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HERBERT G. WOODWORTH

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BY

HERBERT G. WOODWORTH

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CHAPTER I

A COFFIN almost new, stained by the recent rain, stood out beside the yellow plastered wall of a tiny house on the river bank. Far off, across vivid green fields and low brown hills, a pink pagoda tapered upward in seven graceful stories. The gentle lapping of the great Yangtze River murmured against a sloping bank.

The afternoon sun was shining bright and warm, though March was not yet come, and the river had only just begun to rise, to regain the forty-six feet of depth which it had lost in the dry half-year. Now, a very proper stream, it was confined between definite limits. Another six months and it would spread far off into the low country to the North and to the South.

Therefore the coffin and the little yellow house stood on a ridge of high ground well above the river, where scattered mounds told of other coffins finally covered with earth only when they had begun to fall to pieces.

It could not have been because of the heat of the day, for it was only comfortably warm; no living thing was in sight, nothing to suggest life, save only these poor habi-

tations so near together, these dwellings of the living and the dead.

Yet, if one had ascended the slope to the open door, a voice might have been heard, musical, low pitched, the voice of a woman still young. One need not have seen the speaker; the quality of her voice told that she was young. Something proclaimed also that she was well bred, educated; what she said told moreover that she was in a reckless mood, her temper quite out of hand, that she was taking particular pains to wound the person to whom she spoke.

So it would not have been necessary to approach to the very door to hear what was said; nor would the listener, though he had stood an hour, have heard a word in reply.

"'Carried about of winds,'" said the voice. "Do you remember that verse of Scripture? It describes us perfectly: the winds blow two dry little lives into the same corner where they whirl together, they and the dust of the streets and bits of soiled paper. So they were joined, fitly or unfitly, and what chance hath joined together let no man put asunder." Silence for a time, broken only by that soft lapping of the river yonder, and the distant creaking of a water wheel. Then, in a tone of banter that was full of bitterness:

"Slow; that describes you. Slow, old fogy; stodgy; that is a faithful portrait of you! Why should a girl be such a little fool as to throw away her life for the honor of taking your poor name in place of her own which was a perfectly good specimen of English!

"Oh, you needn't say it. I know what's on the tip of your tongue, but you musn't forget I was fifteen years younger than you, and a girl of four and twenty doesn't know the difference between infatuation and admiration. Well, a year in this God-forsaken country has opened her eyes.

"Last night, that line ran in my head all night long: 'Cabined, cribbed, confined.' It seemed to point directly to me—partly in derision, partly in warning. Cabined, I said to myself; that was my poor little suburban makeshift life: while other girls were castled I was cabined. Then I married you, thinking to better myself, and for a year I've been cribbed out here halfway between nothing and nowhere. Thank Heaven, I haven't yet been confined! So there's something to be thankful for. A girl never knows when she's well off. If Father hadn't been such a fool as to forbid it, I should never in the world have done such a thing. The cow isn't the only creature who spends her spare time reaching over into the next pasture to try the grass over there. It isn't because it looks any better over there. It's just because there's a fence.

"Hm! I used to tell the girls, when they asked what you did for a living, that you were a writer. I blush to think of it. A writer! I should have said you were an observer. There is always a crowd of observers on the opposite sidewalk when a safe is being hoisted into an office window. They always think the men doing the job are lazy or timid.

"It would be laughable if it weren't tragic. What can you give a woman? What have you ever given me? What could one expect from your puny income?

"And then, when I do get a chance, when you manage to take me for a treat to Shanghai—why, you don't know anyone; you can't even dance! You might as well be fifty, and done with life!

"If you could even play cards, like other people—but you'd have to stop to count the spots on any card above a three spot! All you can do is look and talk. I admit I used to flatter you and think what you said was wonderful, but I was young then."

A gust of wind, chill and raw, ruffled the surface of the river, following along its course from the mountains far to the west. It tossed the bright green grass in long billowing waves. An aged sycamore felt its breath, and flung his giant arms high in the air. A little column of black smoke that rose and spread into a pall preceded by a little space the throb of engines far upstream signalling the approach of the *Siang Yang* from Hankow.

The coffin, standing clear, unprotected, lonely, trembled in the cold wind as though its occupant were stirring. A cloud obscured the sun. The door of the little yellow house blew shut with a bang.

CHAPTER II

TWELVE hours later, in the half light of early morning, a slender white figure scrambled up out of the river, stood for an instant a gleaming statue of a nymph, then hastily donned a few clothes, and sauntered back to the house for tea and rolls.

She wore what appeared to be a suit of pyjamas, the jacket of a gray brocade, the trousers of sky blue, short enough to reveal white socks and black silk shoes without heels—a native costume common enough among city girls. Her hair hung in a thick dark braid, which, had she been Chinese, would have advertised that she was unmarried.

As she was English it advertised merely that she was a rebel, for her husband stood in the doorway waiting for her, despite his irritation smiling to see her swagger with hands tucked halfway into her trousers' pockets, after the manner of the best society of China.

"Don't look so scornful, Peter," she called. "One doesn't need a bathing suit where nobody ever comes, except now and then a stray coolie. I think there's something very charming about the Japanese method of bathing—*Vox et praeterea nihil*—nothing but conversation. I tried it yesterday on that smug missionary who came along the opposite bank." By this time she had come quite

near and answering the question in the man's eyes, continued:

"But when the test came I lacked courage; convention was too strong for my principles, and I told him to go on his way, or I couldn't come out of the water. At that he tried to flirt with me—in the missionary way—like a cow doing the fox trot."

"You speak of a coolie as you would of a collie," said the man.

"Shows how honest I am," she answered. "That's just the way I think of them. And the missionary—I'd have had more respect for him if he had taken a seat and refused to budge. He walked off quoting a text of Scripture and trying to see me over his shoulder in a little pocket mirror."

As the man turned to reënter the house his eye was attracted by a bit of paper stuffed into the wooden latch of the door. Scrawled on it in his wife's girlish hand he read: "If anyone calls for me direct them to St. Luke xxiv, 5."

She followed him in, saw him without a word get down his Bible from the book shelf which it shared with the "Arabian Nights," Pepys's "Diary," "Isaak Walton," "Grimm's Tales," and a dozen modern English novels. Finding the verse he read it aloud:

" 'Why seek ye the living among the dead?'

"I see," he said, scarcely above a whisper, "this is a continuation of yesterday's invective—so it wasn't momentary but momentous."

A little twisted smile, relic of sensitive childhood, lifted one corner of his mouth. Had he been seven instead of thirty-five, you would have called it a brave attempt to keep back the tears. If the girl saw it she ignored it. She was looking only at that coffin that stood beside the house. Following her gaze his own also rested upon the long yellow box, so familiar a sight in that country, then slowly rose to meet hers. Finding there no sympathy or tenderness, only derision and impatience, the wry smile came again and disappeared, but a wistful appeal lingered in his eyes, a slight trembling of the lids. The whole subject treated by her so lightly, so disdainfully, was to him a vital issue fraught with tragedy.

"Shall I serve Amah first?" she asked when, seated at the little teak table, she had begun to pour the tea that her husband had prepared in her absence. "If you're bound to respect these heathen customs, why don't you keep tea and food on her altar as long as her body is above ground?"

"Please don't!" he answered. "She was very dear to me, ever since I was a small boy. I suppose it's because Mother had to be away so much. But I loved Amah, and it's only a little thing to respect her wish that her body might have the usual honors paid it."

"You must have made a great pair, you and your hobbling nurse; you two paralyzed at the extremities by the bonds of convention! And now I'm launched on the narrow way, the matrimonial path which leadeth unto life everlasting. I understand the everlasting when I look

back over my one year of it. Don't try to turn away. I see the color in your face that confesses you know exactly what I mean!"

Then to herself this strange young wife continued while she watched him narrowly for sign of the reply which she could not force him to utter:

"How I wish he would turn on me in a perfect fury; denounce me for the mean little cad I am; then kick me out until I should have to come crawling back for forgiveness. He doesn't understand women, and he's just about suffocating trying to consume his own smoke."

Peter's face was indeed a revelation of Peter's character, for, while his eyes were dark, flashing fire beneath a frowning brow, his mouth betrayed a desire to give way to the grief and disappointment which so soon had come to mar the happiness of his married life, a life which six months ago he had characterized as an ideal existence. And because of this contest between two opposing emotions Peter was silent and thoughtful. It seemed to him that never before had he so thoroughly appreciated his wife's beauty and charm. What wonderful dark brown eyes, full of laughter and mystery, hinting all sorts of things half hidden behind those lids always threatening to close, shutting you out—or in! He had never begun to fathom those eyes, never expected to fathom them. Her mouth was large but well shaped. After all, he decided, it was in her clear complexion that you found her exquisite charm. No, it was the natural wave of her black hair growing so low on a broad forehead.

"How silly I am," he said at length, though not aloud. "Her beauty is merely the result of health and bodily grace. It's the beauty of the perfect animal. Only one could never find in the animal's eyes what one sees in hers: the spirit, the soul. That's what refuses to be fettered."

He had forgotten to drink his tea; it was growing cold, untasted while he sat there pondering the woman now seated before him and indifferent to his thoughts as to his silent presence. She seemed to enjoy her tea and bread and jam, but her eyes, ignoring all that was near, looked directly over the yellow coffin outside and followed the course of the river up stream, where a great flat house boat had just turned into it from one of the many canals towards the south.

"What pleases you so, Esther?" the man asked, for the sight of the house boat had wrought an instant change in her whole expression.

At the sound of her own name she turned suddenly to exclaim: "Why, Peter Landon, that's the first time since we were married that you haven't called me Vashti or V."

"So it is"; he assented. "Don't know how it happened now."

"I do. You're angry. You've lost your temper."

"You never took the trouble to analyze that nickname," he answered her. "Esther was the girl who supplanted Vashti."

"Well, then, why did you begin by calling me Vashti?"

"Because she was the lady of whom it was written that

she was fair to look upon; but she wouldn't come when the king sent for her."

"And a year ago—when I didn't know you at all—only barely enough to marry you—you selected that insulting nickname."

At this point she chanced to spy just rising above the river bank and approaching the house a tall distinguished man, a Chinese gentleman of wealth and position as one could see at a glance. His clothes were simple but elegant, his manners less simple but equally elegant. He was used to deference and admiration, had tested the power of great riches and knew that all other powers were puny beside that so berated by the politicians, so derided by the poets.

"It is Ko-Yiang," Esther said, watching her husband's face narrowly to learn there how the news impressed him. Seeing neither scowl nor frown she turned to welcome her distinguished guest, at the same time speculating whether Peter was actually blind to events or so occupied with his own visions that he only asked to be undisturbed. Could he have failed to see that this Chinese dilettante, this young man who had travelled all over the world, a linguist, a scholar, a patron of the fine arts, had been laying siege to the heart of the charming English bride; and not without some encouragement from the young lady herself?

Peter, far from indifferent, was occupied with his own thoughts.

This, then, explained her language yesterday, that cu-

rious mixture of irritability and self-consciousness. It wasn't natural; that interlarding of invective with quotations showed that she was playing a part. Now it was plain enough; she was groping for righteous indignation to justify her conduct with her Chinese admirer.

Did she think for an instant that he, Peter Landon, was asleep; that he didn't know what was going on; that he hadn't heard of Mr. Ko's frequent visits for the past two months?

What of that visit only three days ago when in his presence she and Mr. Ko-Yiang had discussed at length the propriety of a young married woman visiting an unmarried man? And hadn't Esther valiantly defended the sanctity of the home, marriage ties and all that sort of thing, then spoilt it all, just as he was leaving, by saying in most caressing fashion:

"You know you are rather a dear old thing. Personalities upset arguments—and, well, I'd like time to think it over—perhaps one might—for a very short stay—under certain circumstances."

To which Mr. Ko had replied: "I allow you three days; this is plenty to ponder abstract questions of marital rights versus wifely privileges."

This was the gradual result of Esther's infatuation for the handsome and accomplished millionaire so much discussed in Shanghai, so envied everywhere, so spoiled by the flattery of women. And both had the effrontery to ignore his presence as an accident of no importance!

Despite a sallow skin, the man did not lack physical

attraction. His eyes were brilliant; there was nothing sinister in their expression; they did not rise grotesquely at the corners. He wore a small black mustache and an imperial just below his under lip. Nothing but his costume distinctly marked him as an Oriental, and yet the traveller would have known his origin though he had been in European dress; a gravity, an air of mysticism, a suggestion of introspection. But superposed upon this eastern foundation, venerable and dignified as it was, arose the new twentieth century temple for universal homage: Wealth.

Wealth beckoned you from the flashing diamond worn upon his thumb; wealth sneered at you from the consciousness of supreme power in the dark glowing eyes; wealth breathed its benediction upon you from the impalpable aura surrounding that unruffled egoism; wealth pervaded the air in every distinct, impatient throb of the engines panting at the river bank below, where the house boat, regal in its luxury, awaited the orders of its lord and master. Wealth—holding in one hand the friendship of Aladdin's lamp, in the other the hostility of the powers of darkness—was approaching the door of the humble yellow cottage, while the husband and wife watched him, the husband vaguely apprehensive and disquieted; the wife exultant, intoxicated by this newest proof of her importance, her power to charm, her opportunity to prove the validity of her complaint that she was wasted in this nook shut off from the real life of the world.

She met him with outstretched hands, with a welcome that came from the heart; that rang a little more positively from her lips than the occasion seemed to warrant; that gleamed from her eyes with so seductive a charm that the guest who had made his million by displaying agility coupled with versatility suddenly changed his manner into something far warmer and more intimate than he had only an instant before intended.

"Oh, my dear, dear, dear little ladee, I'm so glad—so positively joyed to see you—so—what is it? So radiant!"

He stood still to utter this sentiment, solemnly, with all the dignity of attendance upon a queen.

"It must all be due to your coming, Mr. Ko, if I am radiant. My husband will tell you that I was anything but radiant a few minutes ago."

The two men who had thus far only nodded to each other, exchanged a questioning glance; one must verify or disprove such a statement.

"If you are not then so radiant a little since—is it some sadness which have caused this?" asked Ko-Yiang in his literal fashion.

"Not a sadness," she replied, "except my husband's disapproval. He is old-fashioned; doesn't like it because I take my morning dip in the river after the Japanese style."

"Japanese style?" Ko-Yiang repeated, evidently puzzled. "You would mean Japan style of the bath—the clothing—not any? Alas that my poor boat is so slow

to move! Else had I been here in time to—to test the European ladee in the custom of Japan."

"I wonder," thought Peter, "whether she sees that look of the tomcat in his horrid eyes! What strange things women are; they love to set fires and then run away and leave them!"

If Esther had seen the look, it had no terrors for her. Her hand rested lightly on the back of a chair. As though by accident, Mr. Ko's hand presently covered hers. Peter saw the strong fingers close in two convulsive clasps over Esther's. He saw his wife as though unaware of his presence look up with a smile into the dark eyes of the guest. Then she nodded assent. "May I pour you a cup of tea?" she asked him in what tried to be a nonchalant tone.

"I should be charmed," he answered. "My country's best beverage—a boon, surely, to mankind."

"I must get away to work," Peter interrupted, too brusquely to seem a casual utterance.

As he went out into the warm sunlight he was thinking, "How Esther's voice shook when she offered that cup of tea! And what was the meaning of that signal to which she so readily responded? Has she even forgotten that she is my wife?"

CHAPTER III

THE two, standing where they must look across the fresh mound surmounted by the yellow coffin, watched the retreating figure in its shabby gray suit, until the bank hid him for a moment. Then the panting of his engine told that the little motor boat had started on its daily journey up stream to the iron mines where Peter's father, Jeffrey Landon, had sunk all the money he had saved in a lifetime of hard work.

"Look for your money where you lost it," Peter knew to be an old saying in the stock market. It seemed such sound advice that he had determined to act upon it in an effort to redeem some of the losses which had left him poor.

But it was not absorption in his day's work which prevented Peter from looking back at the little yellow house. The hand which seized the wheel was cold, the eyes steadfastly directed up stream burned like fire. Let them watch him, if indeed they would take the trouble! They would see no sign that he was jealous; they would never know of the lump in his throat which was even then choking him!

The little boat had disappeared in the distance when Mr. Ko-Yiang drew from his pocket a black and gold lacquered box, opened it and displayed to the girl's ad-

miring gaze a necklace of carved white jade and red gold intricately wrought, beautiful.

"Very old workmanship," he said clasping it about her neck. "It must have the fitting place to rest. I have found such a place now, the very best home for it."

"But, Mr. Ko, you are so masterful! I haven't said I would accept such a valuable gift."

"No? It is not need to accept—to wear it, so, this is all!"

"But you forget—my husband."

"No, no," he laughed, "not forget—just—" and he ended with a snap of his long yellow fingers.

"Come," he added. "My house boat waits to take you little vacation time to Shanghai. You leave little note Mr. Landon, say excuse while I make the little vacation. Come back soon—much better."

"Do you think he'd believe that about 'much better'?" she flung him as she left the room. He didn't answer. Enough for him that he heard sounds of hurried preparation from the next room, and knew that wealth and he had won another victory.

Little enough she had to carry, but such as it was she stowed in her canvas travelling bag. A note very brief and vague—for she was timid now that she faced reality—lay on the table directed in her erratic hand to Mr. Peter Landon. It was almost an apologetic note, beginning; "Peter dear, I had to go—the lure of Shanghai and Life!"

She looked back at it as it lay there on the table; some-

thing very nearly related to remorse smote her. She hoped poor old Peter would understand that she didn't mean half she had said.

Poor old Peter! Of course he was a dear old helpless thing—and she was coming back to him as soon as she had had her fling in Shanghai.

Once aboard the house boat, who could think of Peter! Here was Mr. Ko, a veritable prince. Her own little apartment fitted for a queen. Tiffin was served on deck under the heavy blue canopy, the air was delightful, the food delicious, the wine delirious. Her host spoke but little, content to lie upon his cushions and look at her. After a while, conscious of his scrutiny, she felt that he was looking through her.

Twice she started to draw him into conversation—that searching look frightened her. Twice she desisted for lack of courage. At last she got up and walked forward into the bow, where perched on a coil or rope she scanned the river far ahead; its dark-winged, flat, fishing craft, its islands rising like minarets, its canals cut through the fields to some distant walled town.

Before her, a day's journey, lay the gay, cosmopolitan life of Shanghai. Behind her, wealth beamed its blessing in the person of Ko-Yiang. Still farther back was Peter Landon, her Peter, a thought at which she trembled, for she felt guilty and somehow contemptible.

Ko-Yiang was a man of the world; he didn't hurry her. When, after hours of listless gazing and reverie, she turned back to her cabin he still lay outstretched upon the

cushions, absorbed in a book, so completely absorbed that he didn't notice her. Peeping through the curtains of one of her windows facing aft she could see him later. He had fallen asleep. How little she meant to him, after all, and how silly she had been to make such a mountain of this little unconventional journey.

"It's many a mile to Ealing," she told herself, "and all the little nonconformist gossip of my girlhood!"

Peter presented the only difficulty. Peter was conventional and would be quite upset over it; but a little kindness would smooth Peter out. He always yielded to treatment. Nine-tenths of life, after all, was involved in the gentle art of handling men.

"It isn't what happens," she said to her exceedingly fair reflection in a little mirror over her dressing table, "it's the excitement of what may happen. That's life!"

Dinner, served at half past eight, was a ceremony. The host was at his best. Food and drink combined to stimulate his brain, to warm his heart, to give new zest to his enjoyment in living. He knew what a woman, a European woman, would relish; he led her on by easy and imperceptible steps toward a semi-intoxication, comfortable and seductive, for he was a master in allurement.

At midnight over their wine he was reciting his latest adventure in shielding from Japan one of her fellow-countrymen and friends who had mixed himself up in a Japanese plot to control China.

"Your friend, Mr. Householder, I have seen him a fortnight since in Seoul where he visits with a Korean

mountaineer, a giant. And this Mr. Householder has met there an American girl, daughter of a missionary. Ah, but they two are a wild pair, wild as the mountain goat that stops at nothing but the bullet."

"How good of you! You are rather a dear," she exclaimed, bending forward to tap the hand that lay extended on the arm of his bamboo chair.

The man's eyes narrowed as he watched her; his hand turned and imprisoned hers. The boys, their table deftly cleared, had vanished with the dishes.

"Don't, please!" Esther whispered, but the man heard a stifled quality in her voice rather than the words, and continued to hold her hand in his.

"Poor old Jerry," she said, half soliloquizing. "I should have been wiser to marry him. He frightened me, he was so wild. Fool that I was, a wild man was just what I wanted; but his terror of a mother thwarted us. The old dragon terrified me by a show of false teeth. Is he still handsome?"

"Handsome?" Ko-Yiang repeated as if the word were new to him.

"That man," she went on ignoring the query, "could make love to an iron dog so it would walk off the lawn."

Again the man's eyes narrowed. His wine was doing its work thoroughly and well.

"You were very good to take so much trouble, such a journey to please me," she said.

"And to serve my country," he added. "It is against my country this plot is made—to put Japanese

upon the throne of China, to make new monarchy."

"Oh, then, I share with China the credit for your journey into Korea."

"Yes," he said, "with my great countree you share, dear lady. It is honor to both that I have paid."

Casually, almost thoughtlessly, he filled her glass and then his own.

"This Householder, then," he asked, "have you still now a—tenderness—love for him?"

His long finger tapped the little table between them, counting off, it seemed to Esther, the time she took to answer so direct a question.

So she waited, wondering how much he cared. The banks were now so dark they seemed miles away. The chug-chug of the muffled motor and the ripple of their bow as she cut the water, were the only sounds.

A swinging lamp above their heads gave but faint light. Two cigarettes glowed in two bright points below it.

Time? What was time to Mr. Ko-Yiang, representative of an ancient race, old centuries before so-called Christian nations were born! Mr. Ko knew little, cared less, for your twentieth century rush. The tiny watch on Esther's wrist had passed midnight an hour ago. Let it tick on, let it tick its little life out. Is not Eternity as much before us as behind! Mr. Ko would not hurry. Even his cigarette burned slowly, controlled by his spirit. The taps of his long finger came slowly and more slowly.

"I never loved him," she said at last very quietly.

"He was too—impulsive. A girl doesn't like violent men, at least I never have. I like deference, reserve, something to keep you guessing."

"Ah!" he sighed, "guessing—favorite American word for opinion."

"But in English," she corrected him, "to guess is to try to get."

"So?" and evidently requiring to think this over he lapsed again into silence, broken only when he reached forward to whisper:

"Then I must guess you——"

"I don't need guessing," she laughed, "I'm an open book."

"If the reading matter be but half so attractive as the frontispiece you are what is called Best Seller."

"And you a Chinese? Why, you might pass for a Frenchman."

In the half light she could see the gleam in his dark eyes as he parried this:

"We of China yield to no European in ardor of—of admiration of beautiful women."

"I thought you were cold—" She was about to say more, but apparently he had taken her taunt seriously. He had dropped on one knee before her, and his strong arms were about her.

She hoped he wasn't going to be melodramatic. She even thought of telling him that it wasn't done, except on the stage. But his arms were overpowering. He was breathing fast. He cared, cared far more than she had

thought possible, this man of the world, unruffled, cynical, a little spoilt by flattery and wealth. Here he was kneeling at her feet, and suffocating with the warmth of his emotion.

And he was very attractive in his big strength, his apparent effort at self-control, here in this very dim light!

She wished that she had drawn the line just before that last glass of wine. An inner, hypercritical self was sitting in contemptuous judgment of her, telling her that she had lost her common sense as well as all sense of propriety, or she would make that man get up and stop. He was actually hugging, and still she seemed to herself to be paralyzed, to be looking on while another couple on the after deck of a palatial house boat—drew very close together.

"Love has no nationality." He was whispering with only a trace of foreign accent: "Oh, but I love you!"

The critical, subconscious self was scornful of such a declaration to a married woman.

Ah! but that self could not feel the beating of his heart or hear his labored breath. And that self had not been drinking his wine. Consequently inside her head no pounding as of a sinful spirit trying to break out.

Tenderly he lifted her, bore her, unresisting as a little child, into her own cabin, where was no light save that vouchsafed by the swinging lamp outside on the deck.

The rhythmic beat of the engine, the rippling splash of the river, these drowsy sounds she heard, and from down below the weird laugh of a coolie who had won at cards.

CHAPTER IV

"Behold Ko-Yiang in the character of Anthony!" exclaimed an habitué of the Shanghai Club, next day at noon. "But who is Cleopatra?"

From the windows of the club house on the Bund a little group of men had recognized the palatial house boat gliding along the water front, had seen a woman reclining under the great awning on the after deck, while the princely owner, recumbent in a long rattan chair, was reading, oblivious of all else save the cigarette which clung to his lower lip, and brightened perceptibly when he gave it his attention.

Was this the woman's thought as she lay there so still, watching the man who could give like a prince, who could take as one entitled to every desire of his heart?

The harbor was crowded with small craft; junks, fishing boats, sampans, flat house boats, the only habitation of families, laboriously poled down by canal and river to dispose of their load of garden truck in the great mart of Shanghai; more flat boats piled high with soja bean cake, goat skins, tea chests, matting, sacks of rice, or strange casks that smelt of sour wine.

At the stern of each craft a strong armed coolie in blue cotton drawers pushed and piloted his boat with a long

bamboo pole, or standing shoved two great oars from him. Shouting in many keys filled the air with strange tone and weird cadence. Tiny children scrambled about on deck in imminent peril of their lives, while their mothers cooked a frugal meal over the little pot of coals. Far more laughter than cursing as each strove for position along one of the many wharves.

Outside in the stream a huge yellow steamer with a single smokestack lay at anchor, the lazy stream of smoke from her funnel telling that she was getting ready to sail.

Close by, anchored fore and aft to prevent her swinging against one of her neighbors, a blue funnel steamer rocked placidly, while a fleet of sailing craft with blue and yellow lateen sails bobbed beside her, dividing among them her cargo of rubber, tobacco and sugar from Batavia.

A gay group of foreigners at the jetty bade good-by to friends aboard the little transport *Victoria* just starting for Woosung at the river's mouth to meet a great Pacific liner too big to come up the river.

Along the Bund dashed pony carriages; rickshas drawn by coolies darted here and there; native porters in pairs bore huge burdens suspended from their shoulders. Foreigners, English, Americans, French, German, mingled with the natives, while at every street corner a tall turbaned Sikh controlled the traffic, awed the unruly and added the dignity of his race and kind to an already brilliant and varied scene.

Slowly the house boat of Ko-Yiang made her way to her landing stage. A motor car of English make awaited

them, the Chinese at the wheel conspicuous in a blue denim livery with collar and cuffs of bright yellow.

Cautiously along the Bund and its motley crowd, off into Nanking Road, where the tall Sikh on duty by the Palace Hotel saluted Wealth and let them go on; then out along Bubbling Well Road by the Race Track until they turned in by the arched gate in a brick wall and drew up before the heavy oak door of a low brick house standing in a garden brilliant with flowering shrubs.

An instant they were scrutinized through a tiny lattice; then the door opened noiselessly, and a solemn man wearing white pantaloons and a long blue shirt bowed low as—in silence—he scanned the master's face to learn his mood.

Three words the master spoke, words unfamiliar to his guest, but the man pressed a button. In the distance a bell buzzed twice, then twice again.

"This way, Missy, please!" said the man and led the way up a short flight of stairs.

"I wish I hadn't been so confoundedly lazy and had learnt more of your dreadful language," Esther called back from the stairs.

"I thought you had mastered that as completely as you have me," Ko-Yiang answered without looking up from his sorting of the pile of letters on a teakwood stand.

"And I found," she continued, accepting his comparison, "that both had so many characters I was lost."

One cannot argue to advantage with one who is mounting a strange flight of stairs. To Ko-Yiang there was

some subtle meaning hidden in her final word, but he pretended not to hear it. Like many of his countrymen he was in the habit of taking his own time to answer questions—for questions steeped in the history of a very old land, often answer themselves. "This has happened before," is the native attitude; "what was the answer then?"

Upstairs a boy was deftly arranging a spacious, richly furnished apartment with a view to Missy's comfort. Clothes, toilet articles, everything! "But how did anyone know I was coming!" Esther exclaimed. "Could it be that he was so sure?"

Books, English magazines, English newspapers lay on the table. Noiselessly the boy came and went. Too noiselessly the woman thought as she was dressing for dinner, but she knew the ways of the Orient and disregarded him along with the ornaments and the brass gong.

At eight they dined. A soft, subdued light, their places laid at one end of the long, narrow table. Two boys well used to their master's ways, anticipated every want. She must indeed have been hard to please who had not found the food delicious, its cooking the perfection of the art. The glasses seemed to possess the magic secret of refilling themselves. After many such refillings, charity toward all seemed to pour out with the wine, a charity which caused Esther to see that all men are brothers.

"This Jerry Householder whom I have seen at Seoul,"

Mr. Ko said, toying with his glass. "You have told me he offers you once—marriage?"

"Yes, that was long ago—in England."

"And it was because he has the wild oats," he asked, "that you refuse him?"

She nodded, wondering at his drift.

"Wild oats are not good family breakfast food," he remarked. "It is a figure of the speech to mean the ladies, is it not? Oh, a strange people, the English, living by ancient Jewish precepts! Here we have wild rice—quite le-gitimate, is it not so?"

His eyes were twin sun glasses, burning her. He took her hand and she did not resist. Are not all men brothers? And how little it cost to please this Aladdin who could work miracles if he were so inclined. What is life but what friends make it! Oh, yes, decidedly one must not be narrow!

"Poor old Peter!"

She was vaguely conscious of having spoken her thoughts aloud, but Mr. Ko only shrugged his shoulders. Husbands were of little account, but somehow the tall figure of Householder kept coming to his mind. That romantic creature who had risked his neck by mixing himself up in a petty plot of a few Japanese officials, must appeal to a woman of her type.

Ko-Yiang was jealous of the man whom she had refused, so jealous that he resolved then and there to bring the two together that he might watch them, might see

with his own eyes whether he or the dashing Englishman came first with her.

His grip tightened upon the little hand within his own. Possession must be reënforced by restraint, and that by inhibitions. Nothing but servitude could satisfy such a nature, and servitude would never be enough because one cannot be sure that he has mastered the thoughts.

"You care more for him now. Is it not so?" he asked.

"More for Peter? More than what?"

"I spoke not of Peter," he answered with a little laugh —"of that other."

"What? Jerry? Why, I don't know. I haven't seen him since just after the war. He came home, you know, from Japan to enter the army. Oh, he was stunning, *stunning* in his uniform!"

"So? And he has kissed you, this soldier?"

"I don't remember," she answered, now quite enjoying the evident jealousy.

A moment the narrow dark eyes rose at the corners changing the man's expression from fond indulgence to something less attractive. His hand mechanically sought the gong, struck it one blow. The boy must have been standing just outside the curtained doorway, for on the instant he was behind his master's chair.

"Writing tablet," said the master. This familiar word Esther understood, but not the reason for it, nor did she know that he wrote upon the tablet a telegram to be sent to Jeremiah Householder at Seoul, bidding him come at once to Shanghai where he might learn further news of

importance concerning that little band of Japanese official plotters.

Had she known, had she understood that trait in the Oriental character which finds pleasure in voluntary suffering, her subsequent career might have been very different from what it was.

The message sent, Mr. Ko once more devoted himself to the pleasure of his guest. Liqueurs were brought and fondness with them.

"You are exceeding beautiful," he exclaimed. "You know this?"

"I know that you flatter like a European," she answered. "Men are all alike."

"Four days hence I will show you it is not so," he insisted.

"Quite Chinese," she said. "In ninety-six hours you expect to find an answer."

When half that time had expired Ko-Yiang and his lady guest were the centre of attraction at the races. The afternoon was perfect, the ponies not more on edge than their gentlemen riders. All Shanghai was there; the betting ran unusually high, and none outdid Ko-Yiang in backing his favorites, but the appearance of so pretty a woman with a Chinese of so well known character was enough to divert attention from mere racing.

As one of the leading matrons put it: "My number one boy says she is staying at his house. Husband not with her. Well, of course—! But she *is pretty!*"

Mr. Ko-Yiang had so much money that people, even

the best, were nice to him. He introduced Esther to such as gave him the opportunity, and they were cordial, even if skeptical. Society in heathen lands is more Christian than it is at home. And Esther, her head turned by so much attention, was having the most delightful time of her life. No one knew that it was with Ko-Yiang's money that she bet so heavily on the gray Mongolian Griffin, but she won, and her little hand bag bulged with the notes of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank. She could buy a car with her winnings, or that necklace that had won her heart in a jeweler's window on Nanking Road. Decidedly this was life!

Peter? Well, Peter mustn't expect a woman of her style to bury herself in the country. Life is too short—why not do something while you can!

CHAPTER V

WHAT of that Jerry Householder whom Esther had characterized as "a wild man"; whom Ko-Yiang had interviewed in the Korean capital as an act of patriotic duty; of whom he had since become so jealous that he had sent for him as one forces on a tight shoe for the joy of relief when it is taken off again?

Jerry Householder had first come to the East fifteen years ago as clerk in a Yokohama tea office.

Perhaps if the Reverend Obadiah Householder of Birmingham had known that his first born son would be his only child he might not have visited him with the prophetic name of Jeremiah, a calamity palliated before he was a week old by the abbreviation 'Jerry'—for the nurse insisted that you couldn't call a tiny bit of a boy by a name big enough for a battleship. So Jerry he had begun, and Jerry he had remained.

His career at Oxford had hardly begun when it was over. One of the dons, replying to a letter from the Reverend Obadiah relative to his son's habits, wrote: "You speak despairingly of your boy's failings. My dear Sir, he hasn't all the vices. I have never heard of his singing."

On receipt of this epistle, Mrs. Householder had tried

to insist that the last word was "sinning," but the weight of evidence was against her.

The day of Jerry's departure for the East, which was the last time he ever saw either of his parents, his father gave him a small volume of "Prayers Appropriate to Erring Youth" which not long afterward found eternal rest in the Pacific Ocean. His mother shed a few ineffectual tears as she kissed him, wondering, as she had always wondered, why children didn't grow up in the way they should go without putting their parents to the annoyance of training them.

With the exception of his three years of war, Jerry had continued to live in Japan for almost fifteen years until one day when on a visit to Shizuoka he had happened upon the beginnings of a plot to put a Japanese upon the throne of China.

In his lack of experience he failed to realize that little plots are constantly being hatched in all countries by radical hotheads and that they die a natural death from exhaustion.

Jerry thought he had hit upon something big, and he went ahead without a care as to what might come to him who ventured to interfere.

He was staying at the Daitokwan Hotel. A funeral procession was passing. Six men in white bore the body on a litter of cedar surmounted by a pagoda-shaped canopy. Men and women followed, walking by twos, the men wearing huge imitation flowers. Others came with wreaths of camellia and the pink japonica. At a little

neighboring temple, reached by a long flight of stone steps, he could see worshippers on their knees before the altar and the image of a god. Candles burned on the altar. There was a vessel of incense and a bell which the priest struck to rouse the god from sleep or reverie, that the prayers might not go unheard.

"How much like home!" Jerry thought, but he had never been confirmed and was not a fair judge.

Behind the funeral a woman came, the thin cleats of her wooden shoes sounding a high "clink" after the confused clumping of the procession.

Seeing a tall blond foreigner on the porch of the Daitokwan she paused, for he had looked and smiled with approval, it seemed to her. Was it her new sky blue flowered kimono with its brilliant red obi, or was it her mincing gait—or was he attracted by her pretty face? She knew that it was pretty. Did not her polished steel mirror tell her so, many times each day?

The stranger sauntered forth into the street. He bent himself at right angles in true Japanese fashion, and she did likewise. Many times he rose to the perpendicular and fell again into a right angle, his hand over his heart; and as many times did she likewise according to the polite usage of the country, she watching the while furtively to see when her superior should tire of the ceremony of bowing.

"Have I the pleasure to address the wife of my friend, Mr. Itpodo?" he asked in excellent Japanese.

"You do me great honor," she replied. "My husband

holds no such exalted position as great tea merchant, Itpodo. He has humble government position."

"Ah? But perhaps you will confer pleasure of your company for tiffin which I am about to order."

She looked about her to make sure that no spying eyes detected this irregular behavior, then quickly followed him into the little dining room completely furnished with a neat straw matting, a tiny table one foot high, and two little mats.

Latticed windows covered with white paper let in the light and prevented distracting sights.

They knelt facing each other, sitting back on their heels on the two little mats.

They talked of things Japanese. And presently over the *Yawa-rakani* (tender chicken) and hot saké served in little cups frequently refilled by the little maid who, when serving, squatted beside the table, Jerry's guest expanded in the laudable desire to please. The saké doubtless helping, the lady grew confidential and told of a plot in which her husband was involved, to rehabilitate China by putting a Japanese on the throne. She told it with pride, while Jerry plied her with more saké and listened, breathless with excitement.

The plotters were to meet next day in Kyoto to learn from the leader how and when to act. Meantime the two had eaten raw Tai fish dipped in a sauce resembling strong tea, they had toyed with pink cakes, sticky, of an unbelievable sweetness. So much saké had set their heads whirling, but Jerry knew that he meant to keep that date

with the conspirators on the morrow, so he steered the conversation away from it, that she might not suspect any such intention.

"Subdivision is the key to Japan," he told her.

"Is it?" she said, finding it difficult to see him clearly. "I didn't notice it. Subdivision? You English are so much more attentive than our men. No one ever gave me a treat like this. It's the kind of division I like."

Jerry, who wasn't quite sure what she had said, waxed eloquent:

"It's the key. You never see a big field here, always a lot of tiny fields separated by ditches or hedges. The side hill is terraced and cut into patches with mud walls to make rice paddies. And loads of merchandise in the streets are never in bulk, always cut up into packages, often cedar boxes. Even coals are in pretty tubs or baskets. I love to see the men who draw huge loads on drays with two great creaking wheels. And the little stallions that are so powerful in their gaudy trappings all bright brass and red leather. Nothing is heavy, crushing, colorless as at home."

"Then you like my country, my people?"

"They are children," he answered, "which in Christian religion means they are fit for the kingdom of Heaven."

The Scriptural allusion she understood not at all; the smile that went with it she could fathom. Rising she seated herself across his knees. Yes, she had rightly translated the smile. The little maid, nothing shocked by friendly habits, carried away the table, the saké went

with it. By and by the light went; the pretty patterns no longer showed white in the latticed windows. Quiet held the streets that in the afternoon had been so full of life.

The little woman who was not the wife of Mr. Itpodo rose to her feet, went softly down the stairs, slipped her little feet into the waiting wooden shoes and was gone, clinking the high note of her sex and class as the thin cleats struck the pavement.

CHAPTER VI

THREE jinrikshas travelled across the city of Kyoto at a rate of speed possible only to the fastest coolies in the service. No public stand supplied these three so spotless, shining carriages or the coolies each in different livery.

Fast as they went, there was no attempt at competition, only to keep up with the leader, for in that land of formality, of ceremony, of caste, the high official goes ahead, the next in order follows, as surely as the letters of the alphabet. Where the road winds up Tea Pot Hill, the stout old gentleman in the lead was the only one of the three whose dignity or age made it necessary that he should continue to ride. The other two dismounted, their coolies thus being free to assist the leader by pushing.

Nearly at the top of the hill stood a little shop close to the road, much like all the other shops, open in front, disclosing lacquer wares, or vegetables, or rows of new wooden sandals. In this one, attractive demijohns and huge blue and white jars might be seen in rows on the floor, and seated on a small platform two men cowering over the *hibachi*, or pot of coals, warmed their hands and furtively watched the road.

The fat man alighted and, followed by his two companions, entered the little shop. The two on the platform

rose and came forward to meet their visitors. The ceremony of bowing began and lasted through several minutes of silence, broken only when the fat man wearied of it. Greetings referring to good health, weather, long life, prosperity and the Emperor's favor were then exchanged. Next came tea in tiny cups, excellent tea and little sweet rice cakes. The fat man said: "In reference to certain business of great importance to the Kingdom we have come from Tokyo to advise you."

Jerry Householder in a corner behind the great blue jars of saké, of oil and sour wine, where he had hidden hours before, heard every word of the discussion which followed, heard the beginning of plans intended to place Japan upon the throne of China, and Jerry knew that if he were discovered there he would never leave the shop alive. Not yet had he discovered that it was not the Japanese government, only a small radical faction, which hatched and nurtured this little plot. He could see the fat man; there was a fascination in watching his long thin mustache and thinner beard as he questioned the others and outlined plans which were to be definitely formulated in a committee of eight to meet a week later in the garden of the *Ginkakuji* or Silver temple.

This, then, was but a preliminary. If Jerry were to get at the real secret he must not only escape detection now; he must contrive to be present at the great disclosure.

Twice he smothered a cough. It seemed that they would never go; but the interview ended, as all interviews

must, and, while the two supposed shopkeepers bade their guests farewell out in the road, Jerry went out through a back window unobserved.

Ginkakuji, one of the oldest temples in Japan, dating back to the thirteenth century, is famous for its garden, its monastery and the room in which the *Cha-no-yu* or Tea Ceremony originated. Ostensibly to celebrate this function, the eight conspirators were to assemble.

The ninth, Jerry Householder, arrived two hours before the appointed time, gave a liberal fee to the young and shabby priest at the door, sat down leisurely on the cloister steps, and began sketching a stunted black pine trimmed into the likeness of a huge duck. The priest watched him at his work for half an hour, then, tiring of it, went inside and disappeared. Jerry pocketed his sketch book, stretched himself to show any chance observer that he had had enough even of *Ginkakuji,* and went out. No watchful priest was at the door. Stepping back cautiously he tiptoed to the angle where the cloister joins the little hall of *Cha-no-yu.* There was space to hide a man in the ancient rafters overhead, but a most uncomfortable perch he found it, thick with the dust of centuries; and by no means a complete concealment if any searcher directly underneath should chance to look above his head.

The old man was the first to arrive. He looked fatter than ever, viewed from above as he kicked off his sandals at the door, and, summoning the priest, instructed him to allow none except his committee to enter. There were

the usual tiresome greetings. Then, by lying flat, he could get a glimpse of *Cha-no-yu,* could see the frothy, green ceremonial tea served in brown bowls, watch the eight backs as they bent towards the altar in unison with their leader while outstretched arms extended the steaming bowls before them, or straightening up, raised them high above their heads. After each manœuvre a draught from the bowl gradually lowered its tide, leaving a green scum of the powdered leaf adhering to the side. The disappearance of the tea was the signal for sweet wafers and more ceremonial, the eucharist of Buddha it seemed to the watcher astride the ancient rafters. Endless these services; what a fool to waste his time and risk his life for this! Then flashed into his mind Byron's verse: "And whispering I will ne'er consent—consented." For suddenly they were in the midst of it, the fat old man was pouring forth his story in a torrent of explosions which from the rapidity and fury of their ejection occasionally back-fired in fierce invective against foreigners. But through it all ran a well defined, carefully ordered scheme.

"You have seen," he said, "how well we have accomplished in Cho-sen. That which was an isolated country, well named the Hermit Kingdom, we have, since we took it from the Russians in 1906 of the foreigners' calendar, opened to travel and commerce. A glorious opportunity for Nippon to expand. It is our purpose now to extend our operations into China, to gain complete control of her vast resources, to work her mines and develop her agriculture."

He then unfolded the plans in detail, giving a list of the men most prominent in the movement. Jerry had long since acquainted his government with the name and rank of the fat man himself, but had been unable to learn who were the others in authority. In a pause for breath one asked: "What of the America?"

"America!" the old man exclaimed. "Look yonder at the Buddha. Does he smile? He is laughing at America in the foreign affairs. It is—not!"

Jerry's head swam with the things he had to conceal by code and cable home to the foreign office. But first he must get away from *Ginkakuji.*

The committee of eight had gone. The shabby priest removed the empty bowls, ate the scraps of cake remaining, locked up the ancient room of Tea Ceremony. His bare feet pattered along the cloister, passed under the listener still clinging to his perch. From a far off room inside a voice was droning in a minor key. Some ponderous beetles close to Jerry's head took up the refrain and bumped it clumsily against the roof. The air was stifling. He could hardly breathe; his long legs were stiff and numb. These trifles, not the danger, were in his mind as he swung himself down and limped toward the gate. The priest followed by a young novitiate came through the monastery door just in time to see the Englishman's descent.

"None may know of our coming here. It is for Nippon," the fat man had told him. This foreigner had overheard something unfit for English ears. Of that the

priest felt sure. He must be stopped; at any cost he must be held until Authority should decide. He darted by the foreigner and forbade him the door. "Go back!" he said in polite Japanese. "I have questions to ask." To the boy he whispered: "Quick, the guard," and let him slip out through the narrowest possible opening.

But the Englishman did not go back. His strong hands seized the priest and flung him aside; opened the heavy door and, when he was out, closed it again with a bang.

As Jerry Householder ran he could hear the priest coming on behind him bellowing "Sacrilege" and, when that proved ineffectual to stop him, "Murder!"

By this time a crowd was in pursuit. He dodged down a narrow street, nearly colliding with a bull that hauled a mighty load of Hokaido cheese in cedar boxes. The driver walked by one of the high wheels holding a rope that ran to the bull's horns and thence to a wooden ring through his nose. It seemed strange to Jerry that he should take in these particulars as he ran, that he should note the animal's collar of plaited rope, the ornate saddle and gaudy little blanket under it. The great dray almost filled the street as it swung to turn the corner. It shut off his pursuers for an instant, giving him time to dart into the doorway of a lacquer factory. The crowd swept on toward the street of bazaars, but two of the police stopped where the fugitive had disappeared. They spoke his name, and one said: "He has been on our list long since. I have known him these ten years. His home is in Shizuoka."

Inside the factory men and girls in the little dimly lighted rooms scraped the well seasoned cedar, spread the sticky poisonous gum of the lacquer tree, or shoved away in the dark recesses of the drying closet trays of half-finished products for their ten days' drying process. All the twenty stages of patient care necessary for lasting results were here in process. He could see the skilled hands at their work. Jerry mounted the narrow stairs. A tiny room at the top where colors were kept and carving tools lay on the bench held but one living creature, a black and white rooster, whose tail feathers hung from the lofty perch on which he sat fully seven feet to the floor. Jerry sat down on a low box behind the bench. If any one should find him there he could be waiting for Mr. Nogara, the proprietor. But no one came.

Twilight, and the rooster settled himself for the night. Not so Jerry Householder. Darkness was his only hope, and under its friendly protection he stole out once more into the crowded street, sauntered until he reached the main road west, then hurried on as fast as he could walk to cover the twenty-seven miles to Osaka.

Near midnight, faint from hunger, having travelled two thirds of the distance, he entered a tiny village hoping to find food. Happily in the knowledge that his mission was dangerous, he had brought a good supply of money.

A light shone through the front window of one house. Confident in the lure of silver he was about to knock on the frail door when a voice within the house said quite distinctly in Japanese:

"Agama said he speaks good Japanese. You can tell him by that. But I hold that he would not leave Kyoto. They will have him by morning."

"Huh!" came by way of assent from two others, but Jerry Householder had heard enough. They might or might not be talking of him. Tired as he was, this village was no place for him; on he plodded, though at a slower pace, for he must reach a city where he was little known, then by some means drop out of sight.

Morning found him at breakfast in Osaka just as the thousands of factory hands were going to work. Then for two hours he slept in a shed until a dispute just outside roused him. Fearing that it would not be safe to take the train he set out again on the great western road, this time determined to conceal his knowledge of the Japanese language. But none questioned him in the twenty miles to Kobe. There to make himself appear a tourist he bought a bag, a few toilet articles and a complete set of brushes, paint tubes and a couple of small canvases. Painting was an art which he had hitherto admired only from a distance. It might serve to throw his pursuers off the scent.

On the train between Kobe and the western province of Yamaguchi he was painfully aware that he was being watched. A zealous official came into the car to look him over at least half a dozen times, finally accosting him in Japanese:

"How far are you going?"

But Jerry was prepared, and only looked puzzled.

The question was repeated.

"Pardon me," Jerry said, "I am English. I speak only English and French."

"Do you not speak even a little Japanese? Not a few words?" asked the official, apparently, so Jerry thought, to trap him into a reply.

The Englishman only stared at him, and that stare was good enough as acting to land him unmolested in Moji. The short journey from there to Shimonoseki he made by boat, hiring a fisherman to take him. As they lay in Moji harbor a big steamer close to them was coaling, and Jerry forgot his danger, watching the process by hand labor. Sixteen barges had made fast to the ship on each side. Through her open bulkheads from each of the thirty-two barges poured a steady stream of soft coal in flat, half-bushel baskets passed from hand to hand by a swarm of men and women standing on stagings which, like huge but flimsy staircases, led up from each barge. For six hours they worked at terrific speed, in that time loading no less than three thousand tons of coal. What clothing they wore was of the coarsest burlap and cotton, but the endurance they displayed would rank them with gods and goddesses. Their good nature through the trying hours set an example for gods and men alike. And when the work was done, out came the tiny stove. Tea was made; dried fish and dirty bread proved an appetizing meal. Sails were hoisted, and in a lively breeze one by one they scudded for the shore, men working while the tired women huddled in the stern. What an energetic race,

this! What capacity to work, to endure, to persevere! These were qualities to win Jerry's admiration.

Though he far overestimated the power of the plotters whom he had outwitted, he was not wrong in assuming that they had good reason for getting him out of the way before he could report what he had learned to the Japanese government.

Just as the *Shiragi Maru* blew her whistle and cast off for the rough passage across the hundred and twenty miles to Fusan, Jerry left his boatman asleep in one of the little shops that crowd the fish stalls facing the quay. The man was drunk enough to lie where he was till morning. That comforted Jerry, who was the last passenger to get aboard; it meant temporary safety. The hundreds of small craft huddled at the docks blended till their masts were a tiny forest. The winding entrance to the harbor between lovely wooded hills soon shut out the town. Japan was a thing of the past. Jerry Householder was beginning a new life.

CHAPTER VII

WHERE the single line of railway winds north from Fusan through the great mountain gorges of Korea, the mighty intruder came roaring, shrieking its challenge of civilization to a region over which a few years ago the tiger and the leopard roamed unmolested. For a moment clatter and roar were stifled in a deep gully; then out they burst with renewed fury, determined to shatter every ancient tradition of the Hermit Kingdom. At the semblance of a crossing, where the constant tread of bullocks' feet had worn a path from valley to mountain slope, stood a huge man dressed in the coarse, unbleached cotton of his country. With hands clasped behind his back, feet wide apart, his big yellow features relaxing not a muscle, he waited for the coming of the evening train.

Far up the stony slope of a gray mountain, on the edge of a wild ravine, a stone hut perched and clung on its little shelf of rock. Behind it a low wall surrounded the tiny enclosure where was a shed for stabling bullocks. Rough thatch covered the roofs. The door and narrow window of the house were black and forbidding.

So much could be seen from the train as it puffed and snorted, slowing down to climb the steep grade. One might then have noted that the man's white frock, belted at the waist, fell almost to his knees, that his trousers,

wide above, were folded and strapped about his ankles. Black hair and a glossy black beard cut square lent sternness and dignity to an aspect otherwise ferocious.

Only the man and the hut, apparently his home. No other sign of living thing save these and the path at his feet. These were seen from the train and carefully noted. Yet other eyes marked the giant Korean as he stood at the lonely crossing; other eyes saw the train owned and operated by the Japanese Government, steaming north on its daily journey over the new Cho-sen Railway to the ancient walled city of Seoul.

A man and a woman, silent, breathless, peered through the tiny, black window of the hut at the white figure far below them. The man's hand rested on the rough stone window sill, and the woman, a slender girl of sixteen years, leaned against his strong shoulder, clasping his arm in both her shapely hands.

From the rear platform of the last coach two Japanese hailed the Korean in his native tongue:

"Have you seen aught of an Englishman, fair, tall and spare, who has just come over from Shimonoseki? There is a reward."

The big man shook his head, uttering a stolid "No!" and showed no slightest interest in their quest or the quarry.

On rolled the train, the two still standing on the rear platform, scanning the country through field glasses, narrowly watching the hut on the mountain side and the mighty Korean standing like a statue at the crossing.

But no stir of life about the hut rewarded their scrutiny; scarcely more could they discover in the solitary giant not deigning so much as to turn his head to follow them.

"What now?" exclaimed the Englishman whom they sought, "Why does he stand there? Look, Yisan!"

The girl, unable to understand a word he spoke, caught something of his meaning, for she scowled at the distant back of her husband, immovable, imperturbable, waiting where the train had found and left him. Then she smiled, gazing eagerly into the Englishman's anxious eyes, revealing the dark loveliness of her own and the full red lips that parted over the whitest of teeth.

"Sin Chang sees danger," he added.

The girl smiled yet more enticingly, held up her face to his and whispered:

"Kees me, Anglisman!"

The man frowned and put her from him, but not roughly, for the temptation was great.

The last faint throb of the engine died in the distance. Silence once more; solitude, the dark gray sides of mountains ages old, crumbling away in countless slides of broken stone, rough valleys where stunted fir trees told of an unfertile soil, and Sin Chang, turning to climb the steep path, went slowly towards his home, his bride and the guest for whose safety he was risking all that he had, a giant amidst the giant mountains, mysterious, impenetrable as the solitude itself.

The man and the girl came out from the hut and stood on the little ledge of rock beside it.

Against the sombre background of rock and scrubby firs Yisan's green silk coat, a patch of vivid color, caught the Korean's eye, but his scowl betrayed how little he was pleased to see it.

Why had she put on the coat reserved for visits to the great city? Why was she idle when it was already time to take the two wooden pails, and, following the path behind the house, through the narrow pass, descend into the little plateau where Sin Chang pastured his goats? Milking time, and Yisan wearing her silk coat buttoned like a cape around her neck, the sleeves dangling unused, after the fashion of city women!

"Pah! And the foreigner but forty-eight hours in my house! She has eyes already for this yellow-haired Englishman, she whose father promised her to me when she was but ten years old, and made that promise good only two months since. Do I not own the girl? Is she so dull, then, that she thinks I have no eyes to see?"

His thought flew back to the passing of the evening train two days before, when he had stood to watch it, to catch any word of news that might be flung him. He recalled the Englishman whom he had spied at the rear of the train and had surprised by hailing him in fairly good English:

"Anglish? Glad to see. Like to talk Anglish. Good-by."

To which the English had said: "Hello! Is that your house up there?"

Sin Chang called back: "Yes, my house. Come see me."

Two hours later, when it was growing dark, there had come a knock at his door and Sin Chang flinging it open, barring the passage with his mighty bulk, had recognized the Englishman come so soon to accept the proffered hospitality.

Jerry Householder, long, lean and sinewy, looked up until he met the eyes six inches above his own; looked down to make sure that the Korean and he were standing on the same level; then with an admiring smile extended his hand:

"I took you at your word," he said, as the giant acknowledged the greeting with a mighty handshake.

"I take it a pleasure. Yisan," indicating the pretty girl who came forward from the dark little room, "she is my new wife. Only two moons I marry, bringing her from the home of my friend in Taiden by the hot springs of Jujyu."

The visitor noted that the girl's hand was slender, not roughened by hard work; it seized his with a cordiality that was almost hunger.

Soon a light was brought, a smoky oil lamp without a chimney, and Yisan laid three plates on the table, and goats' milk in a stone jug, a cold roast that had the tang of wild game, and coarse bread from home-milled rye. The remains of a few faggots still glowed on the hearth; the scant wood-pile bore mute but constant testimony to

the labor of transporting fuel over the mountains on the backs of bullocks.

Almost in silence the three gathered about the narrow table, ate their meal, while the girl frankly admired the gentle foreigner, and Sin Chang, after his own ponderous fashion, took note of the newcomer, of his dress and manner, but, above all, the expression of his eyes. He saw, though he betrayed by no sign that he saw, how his young wife was fascinated. The girl whom he had thus far failed to impress with any other emotions than awe and a mild aversion tempered with obedience to his will as her lord and master, was fascinated by the Englishman. Was it because he was white and a gentleman?

Whatever the reason, before they had finished eating, Sin Chang was satisfied that his guest had no designs upon Yisan, but was chiefly interested in him. It was not unnatural for a woman to look thus upon a comely man, but the hunter who is out for a tiger skin wastes no shot upon the hare. This man was wholly taken up with something big—life or death. One might see it in his eyes. What to him would be a woman's love! Sin Chang pushed back his chair, lit with one of the embers a tiny pipe with a long bamboo stem, watched his guest light a cigarette, then asked:

"From Japan you have come, from Fusan?"

"Yes, friend. I have lived ten years in Japan, buying tea for the Americans. At last came trouble. Certain of the Japanese think I know too much."

"Too much of what?" asked the Korean, showing his big yellow teeth.

"Too much of their plans for this country and China."

"Huh!" commented his host, with a shrug.

"So they got after me, tried to arrest me, and I fled—to Moji. It was a close pull for me, but I got away—and—when you spoke to me in English I said, 'There is a friend,' so when the train slowed down for the grade a mile beyond, I jumped and made my way back. I have committed no crime."

"Crime?" the Korean repeated, evidently puzzled.

"Nothing wrong. No killing or——"

"Too bad. Why notta kill someone?"

"Not in my line," the Englishman answered.

"No? But you are strong. I know the strong man. I kill to live. Here in the hills I hunt the big cats and the bear. I grow some crops, ver' small, some grape—I take the small animal in the traps. All my skins I carry up to Seoul—Japanese call it Keijyo—Pah! and they call my country 'Cho-sen.'"

Jerry Householder could see by this that his new friend was no exception to the rule; that he distrusted the Japanese invaders of his land though they had in the last few years built six hundred miles of railroad, had transformed Seoul into a modern city and opened the country to commerce with the world.

Yisan's dark eyes followed the conversation. The words meant nothing to her, but she knew when men

smiled as they talked; she knew likewise what it meant to see anger in their faces and the bitter sneer. She had seen knives follow to cut deeper than words, had seen one lie bleeding on the floor, while the other wiped his knife on the inside of his blouse and put it calmly back in his belt. Yisan was young, but she had seen life—and death. She judged men by what she saw, not by what she heard. And Yisan knew that for some strange reason her husband and the Englishman were friends.

"You speak English well," Householder continued. "Have you lived in England—or America?"

"Never have I been outside Korea; once down to Fusan, many times north to the Yalu River at Shingishu, but never across to Antung, never leave my own countree."

"You must have had a remarkable teacher."

"Yes, the missioner Farley some, and the daughter of missioner much more. He teach the Jesus religion; I learn the Anglish."

"Didn't Miss Farley also teach religion?"

"Ver' little. Keep the house for old man. Missy dead. One day she tell Jesus religion everybody love everybody. I like this. I say: 'Come and love me.' She turn ver' red and run away. We make great friends after that. She teach me Anglish. Beautiful lady, and now her father the missioner have died, she go back soon to America. I lose good friend." Far into the night they talked, sizing each other up after the way of men. And Yisan made her own estimates—after the way of women.

However, Sin Chang gave him a bed that night, a test of hospitality in a hut that had but two rooms, and Jerry Householder was not the man to betray such trust or disappoint his new friend's estimate.

Many times in the first two days of his stay had Yisan tried to ensnare him, tried to shut him in behind the dark curtains of her eyes, or imprison his hand in hers—any of the thousand ways in which a woman may speak to a man though they have but half a dozen words in common. Jerry Householder had lived thirty-five years, and in that time had learned that sometimes one should look not upon the wine when it is red within the cup. And sometimes, rarely, he lived up to what he had learned.

The day after his arrival Sin Chang mounted on the back of a bullock had set off early in the morning, his long gun slung across his shoulders. A top-heavy load it seemed to Jerry Householder watching the patient little beast pick his way down the defile, soon lost to sight on the plateau, only to reappear in a few minutes toiling up the narrow path into the wild mountains toward the north.

Never once did the giant hunter turn his head to look back to his distant home. The Englishman watched him till he had dwindled to a moving speck, and was gone. Then two soft round arms stole about his neck and Yisan's bright lips were teasing for a kiss.

"No!" he said firmly, but, in putting her away, he couldn't refrain from a lingering hug, though the kiss he refused.

But Sin Chang's wife understood neither the language

nor the principle. To the opportunist opportunity is everything.

All that day Householder busied himself carrying armfuls of wood from the plateau and neighboring hills. It was essential to his safety that he keep hidden from the valley where at any hour the Japanese might come in search of him, but he found enough to do in adding to the little wood-pile behind the hut.

In the afternoon when the sun began to hide behind the peaks back came the hunter on his tired beast, a tawny skin flecked with black hanging limp and a little bloody across the bullock's withers.

One appraising glance of the narrow black eyes took in the guest and his day's work; the bride not too busy to be peeping from the half-open door; the tiny thread of white smoke that rose from his chimney straight into the wintry air—and Sin Chang, turning the bullock loose to find his way to the shed, went to work stretching the fresh skin on a frame, where it could dry without shrinking.

That night again the two men talked till late and became better friends.

The second day was like the first, save that the hunter came home earlier, and empty-handed. And, when far off down the valley could be seen the smoke of the evening train, Sin Chang went down to take his place by the crossing.

"They may be coming, the Japanese, to look for you," he said as he left the hut. "Maybe I get news for you."

Climbing slowly back an hour later he spied his wife's gay coat flaunting its green silk sleeves in the air. Lucky for Jerry Householder that he had made friends and won the confidence of his host, or the Korean would have killed him, strong and resolute as he was, lifting him in his mighty arms, breaking his back as he had done for man and beast in many a fierce encounter.

Yisan seemed not to fear him. Her white teeth gleamed, her dark eyes flashed, her gay laugh rang, even as she faced her husband's frown.

Without a word to her the Korean beckoned to Householder. The two men entered the hut and shut the door; the woman, laying aside her gaudy coat, found her two pails and went in search of the goats. A half hour later Sin Chang was at work feeding and watering his bullocks for the night.

The sun sank behind the dark shoulder of the bleakest mountain as two small figures in the uniform of the Japanese military police crept cautiously towards the little hut far up on the slope that lies to the north of the railway, close by the great Black Dragon ravine.

Two Japanese officials ordered to arrest a dangerous criminal were creeping towards the lone hut on the mountain side when the giant Korean spied them, shrugged his mighty shoulders, turned his back, and, after gazing in apparent absorption at the ravine beside him, entered his house and shut the door. This much the two saw as they lay flat beside a big rock far below. Obviously their ap-

proach was unsuspected. No slightest sign of haste or nervousness up there on the mountain betrayed that the obvious may not be the truth.

Yisan, who had come back with her milk pails full, sat mutely worshipping the Englishman, but Sin Chang noted that the table was between them. Curiously enough it was the man's behavior which he watched. Sin Chang was not a sentimentalist, but a philosopher, and the intervening table was due to his guest's interpretation of the code.

"The little spies," he said. "Already they sneak up on us looking for you. There is still time, some minutes. Follow me."

The two men climbed out through a back window and disappeared in the little yard. Yisan had started to follow them, but a sharp command from her husband had sent her back to her seat, where she scowled at the stone floor and pouted because men were so stupid.

Twenty minutes later, as she and Sin Chang waited, a sharp authoritative knock at the door brought her to her feet. No such sound had she ever heard before in her brief married life. Who was there to knock? She threw a questioning glance at Sin Chang, who merely nodded for her to open.

Two Japanese officers entered cautiously, each holding a revolver before him in readiness to fire. Yisan leaped back in terror, but the huge Korean only laughed, calling out: "Come in, strangers."

The strangers were wary and not to be cajoled by the

rough pleasantry of a mountaineer. Their sharp eyes noted the table set for two, the kettle boiling over a fresh fire. The woman. Ah! here lay their hope. So young and pretty a girl would betray herself if she were trying to hide the foreigner.

The officer who had two buttons on his sleeve denoting his rank made a low bow to the girl and her pulchritude, but he still held his pistol before him.

"We seek a foreigner," he said, "English. So fair a lady would attract the foreigner, would charm even one in the performance of his duty. To save your husband's life, your life, you must not longer shield a fugitive from justice."

The lady's big dark eyes opened in wonder, but she was a woman and thought she knew men.

"We welcome you," she answered in her native tongue. "Whatever is ours we are honored to share with you."

Her look was yet more hospitable than her invitation. It so disarmed her questioner that he tucked away his pistol out of sight. How should he know that the lady, unable to understand a word of Japanese and not given her husband's confidence, was only guessing the object of their visit!

"You are very good, very good," replied the officer, still in Japanese and still in the dark, "but first"—with a sweeping gesture—"we must search the premises."

Thinking that she understood the gesture, Yisan answered, following the direction of his gaze:

"We could give you better accommodation for the night

in the cattle shed. This garret is too low and too much the home of spiders."

"So!" and, placing a chair beneath the open hatch, the second officer drew himself up to investigate the garret so disparaged, while his companion stood guard below.

"Just as the charming lady describes, so is it," was his report as he jumped down a moment later.

"The lady will excuse," said the two-button man, whereupon both backed out of the door and circled the house, one going to the right, the other to the left. They met at the entrance to the little yard, and now Sin Chang thought it time to lend a hand. Coming slowly from the house he spoke without haste or apparent interest:

"It would be better I should open the gate. My dog is not friend to the stranger."

The two stood back, the little wicket swung open; from one corner of the shed came a huge, wolfish dog, black as night, his curling lip uncovering wicked fangs. And, while his tail proclaimed a welcome for his master, the sensitive nostrils puckered and the long fangs gleamed to show that he knew without being told that strangers from a strange land had come, and he distrusted strangers.

"Down, Oo-loong!" rumbled the heavy voice of the master, and on the instant the dog dropped.

"Enter, strangers. Nothing is here to harm. The bullocks yonder are gentle as sheep."

"But why 'Oo-loong'?" asked the two-button man. "Is it not the name of a tea?"

"So!" nodded Sin Chang. "But is not Oo-loong in the

Chinese black dragon? Such also is the name of this dark ravine. For my faithful dog also, had you seen him holding at bay the jaguar while I was reloading, you would believe Black Dragon a fitting name."

"Very pretty in its idea," the Japanese grunted. "The dog, I dare to say, is fierce, terrifying even by his forbidding look, as do the dragons. But I did not know this of the Chinese tongue: Oo-loong to be black dragon."

He seemed so absorbed in the name as to have forgotten the object of his visit.

Sin Chang turned his back and became interested in restoring to the wall half a dozen stones knocked down by a venturesome bullock. Not once did he look over his shoulder to see what the intruders were doing. They were quite sure of this indifference, because one of them watched him closely while the other searched the shed, the rough cupboard, the water barrel, even the little stacks of hay and rye straw in a corner.

The black hound crouched where his master's command had checked him, his great head pressed close to the outstretched paws. Only his eyes moved, they followed every step of the strangers, and once when they repeated his name, his lip curled back in an ugly but silent snarl.

No sign of the fugitive was to be found in the shed. He could not make his way down into the ravine; the only other way of escape lay in that path back through the pass, over the plateau and up into the mountains. By following that path they would overtake him or meet him stealing back.

No man, government man or civilian, could have passed the back window of the hut without regarding the dark beauty gazing forth to meet the disappointed searchers, to question them with all the ingenuous directness of a child. She knew now that she had guessed the truth, and she was acting her part all the better for that knowledge.

"Where is the Anglishman?" she laughed, in her own language. "Let me see him before you shoot and make dead the missioner."

The two stopped short within a few feet of flashing eyes, gleaming teeth, well rounded arms resting on the sill.

As for their Englishman it was obvious that to her he was only an object of curiosity and, because he was white, a missionary. Not finding him here was merely negative evidence, but this was positive.

"He is not here," one answered her. "We think it is for Taiden he makes."

She tried to look responsive, though she understood no word of what they said. Then she had a happy thought: "You will stay the night with us. I see so few—never the nice men."

When she had uttered this her eyes took flight at her own boldness, looking for hiding place in her bosom. The two Japanese immediately went in pursuit, as it were, and came back breathless.

"Could we not, perhaps, stay?" asked the junior. "Night would surely overtake us in the mountains yonder,

and what advantage to offer ourselves a target if he should be hiding to draw us on?"

"Bushido!" spoke the elder man, and this one reference to the knightly honor of his native land was enough. As the sight of the cross to the crusader so to both of these men the very mention of the great moral code of Japanese knighthood, putting king and country before happiness, before family, or life itself, drove out every other desire or emotion.

"Bushido!" both repeated, then, with only a longing glance at the appealing vision in the window, they traversed the path to where the goats lay huddled for the night, on up the steep trail to the edge of the woods, paused finding nothing but solitude, and soon came tramping back.

Sin Chang, not to be caught unawares, had not finished the work on his wall. Yisan, no longer at the window, was busy over her kettle.

This they saw as they darted back into the hut, a habit which had taught them that thus sometimes one might surprise the fugitive. Yisan, who was there alone, shook her head to show that she was hurt because they scorned her invitation.

"Sayo Nara!" and they were gone, down the rough road to the railway, then on toward the south till darkness shut them in and blotted them out.

CHAPTER VIII

THE coarse thatch on the roof of the shed where it sloped toward the ravine, stirred, parted and gave up the long, sinewy limbs of a man who clambered over the ridge and dropped to the ground in front. Oo-loong came silently forward to poke his cold nose into a friendly hand, while in the darkness his tail signalled congratulations for dangers past and promise of a dog's eternal devotion to a friend. In silence Jerry patted the hound's head; then crossed the yard to the door of the hut.

Sin Chang had drawn up to the table; his wife was ladling the steaming rice from a copper kettle. At Jerry's entrance the Korean showed his yellow teeth and nodded towards an empty chair. Behind him at the fire a telltale blush betrayed the girl's thoughts. Neither spoke till Jerry whispered: "Are we safe?"

"Safe," Sin Chang assured him.

"Yon black hound of mine—he made them timid to come prowling back again. And Yisan—O, Yisan, you act ver' well—so not knowing! how you say lady actor talk—this 'I do not know what you mean!' "

This pleasantry his wife made him repeat in Korean, whereupon, looking straight into Jerry's eyes, she blushed again.

"My three very good friends, I cannot thank you enough," Jerry answered. "But I must not stay a day longer, putting your lives in danger."

"You must not go!" exclaimed his host vehemently, bringing down his heavy fist upon the table. "To leave now is death, it is sure death. I have plans which you help me to bring down the missioner's daughter from Seoul. You shall not to be seen going up. I go alone. I come back with missioner's daughter and you."

"But can I be of any service, any help to you?" Jerry protested.

"So!" grunted the giant; then bared his teeth in a grin. "Whisker, much whisker on the face make another man." Stroking his own black beard he eyed Householder's rough chin approvingly, seeing in it fine possibilities of disguise.

Yisan was puzzled. Her own man was disconcerting; the stranger was an enigma. Could he not see that she favored him, that she was fond by nature, that Sin Chang was much away from home? Yet this Englishman who was keenly interested in her husband, hanging on every word he spoke, virtually ignored her charms. Even the two bustling little Japanese were far more human, but she had deliberately deceived them to shield this man whose heart was a stone.

All through supper the men talked in unintelligible English while the woman pondered these things in her heart, and plotted schemes for melting stone.

A week passed. Each day at the same hour the giant

Korean stationed himself at the crossing to watch the evening train as it labored climbing north. Sometimes he exchanged a word with passenger or guard. No more officers came seeking trace of the fugitive Englishman.

One stormy day in the second week after the coming of Jerry Householder, a lone traveller crossed the mountains on the back of a bullock. He wore the native white duck clothes and the inverted waste paper basket which is the hat of the priesthood. If any other traveller caught sight of that hat he would probably hide lest he be importuned to give in the name of Buddha. The priest, whose religion did not extend beyond his hat, drove before him a bullock heavily loaded with skins well tanned and baled. He went north over the well worn, narrow trail that leads to the great city of Seoul.

Lucky for him that the trail was worn, lucky that the beast in the lead knew his road, for the man had never before seen it and, despite Sin Chang's instructions, he had misgivings as the walls of the city came in sight.

On a sharp ridge, the last before reaching the wall, the two bullocks stood clearly outlined against the sky. A little party of surveyors a mile away raised their field glasses to scan them closely, but apparently satisfied they resumed their work. One of the eight gates, that called Nandaimon, opened before him through the wall, which, in a circle of fourteen miles, had for centuries protected the city by its impenetrable granite rising to a height of twenty feet, a defense so much surer than covenants and treaties.

"What a shock to the rulers who spent such vast sums of energy, of ingenuity and slave labor, if they could come back and see an airplane sailing placidly over the strongest fortified towns!"

So thought Jerry Householder, safe in the dirt and dress of a priest, viewing for the first time the useless walls of a past civilization already being thrown down to make room for progress, the new pushing aside the old, the new jostling, hurrying, tooting its blatant horn, never pausing to consider whether some of the old had not better be retained.

To right and left of him the wall climbed the peaks of mountains or dropped into the deep recesses of a valley.

Once more he pushed ahead for Nandaimon, much farther distant than it looked. An hour later, almost at dusk, he had gained the great southeast gate. A gang of half a dozen coolies, each holding a long rope, operated by hand a clumsy wooden pile-driver, and worked to the tune of a chantey. The workers scarcely favored the priest with a glance, but their foreman, a sharp-eyed Japanese, scrutinized him with the care of one trained to observe and tabulate everything. Beyond this habit he showed no unusual interest or curiosity as the priest passed him and went on into the city.

Two men approached bearing, suspended from a stout bambo pole, an old-fashioned litter in which huddled a wrinkled old man. Being near his end and anxious to lose no chances of a restful hereafter he saluted the priest, receiving in return his first experience of the sign of the

cross, Jerry having for the moment forgotten what sort of priest he was. The old man had neither thought nor curiosity as to the meaning of the gesture.

Down Shoro Street he drove, or rather followed his leader by the old imperial palace, until he came to a huge granite tortoise in a yard. Sin Chang had told him that this monument was nearly a thousand years old and represented the spirit of the Orient. To Jerry's exclamation of surprise: "A tortoise! As slow as that?" Sin Chang smiling had replied: "Is it not in all ancient fable —the tortoise to outrun the hare? My country say: What hurry? Where is it to go? You run ver' fast—what for? Is it to get somewhere else besides the grave? That is where man goes; you live fast hurry, American man life; you get there so much sooner. Is it not so?" A hard lesson for Jerry Householder, this restraint.

Now he dismounted and stood curiously examining this great symbol of Eastern wisdom.

The bazaar in a neighboring court was crowded with shoppers. The merchants sat cross legged before their stalls in which were displayed hand-wrought silver or copper utensils; cabinets of cedar bound with brass; embroidered garments of violet, green or orange silk; dainty sandals for women's feet; bells and ornaments for religious decoration.

From one of these stalls came the big form of Sin Chang towering above the crowd. He took the dishevelled priest by the hand leading him apart to question him about his journey. The bullocks stood and waited

outside in the road. Presently coolies unloaded the pack from the leader, Sin Chang bestrode him, or, rather, perched on his back, for he held his feet up squatting on the broad pack saddle in what looked to be a most uncomfortable position. Balanced there like a huge Buddha, he led the way vouchsafing for explanation only the two words: "missioner's daughter."

By the marble pagoda they went, by the great bell that twenty years ago rang every night at ten a warning that the gates were to be closed, after which no shop might keep open, no citizen might show himself in the streets.

Up a narrow lane bordered with high gray walls a sandal tree leaned far out, dark green against the brilliant blue sky. The tong-tong, tung-tung of a two-toned drum sounded at regular intervals divided by the wailing of women's voices in unison. They were smothered voices seeming to come from a chorus immured close by the sandal tree. Sin Chang turned abruptly to the left through a tiny gateway and the two bullocks stopped in a little courtyard surrounded by low stone buildings, old, dingy, but fascinating, with their wee porches and beetling balconies.

From the smallest shed, which Jerry thought might well be an abandoned tram car destitute of wheels, came the long drawn and difficult quaver of the voices in a minor key, highest art of the Korean geisha. Stooping almost to his knees the giant opened the sliding door whence came the sound, and Jerry stooping also beheld a group of a dozen girls in bright silk robes of various col-

ors. They sat on the floor huddled together with two old men, one of whom tapped at both ends the strange drum shaped like an hour glass held horizontally, while the other beat time with a bony finger, and led the interminable quaver rising, falling, breaking in pitiful wails, but keeping on and on to test the listening ear no less than the singers' breath control. Long, thin, white beards depended from the aged chins, to take the place of chaperones, Jerry surmised, while noting that the whole party seemed to have slid down into one end as though someone had tipped up the tram car to bring the choir close together.

The drummer nodded to Sin Chang in friendly recognition, but the music continued without interruption save for the giant's utterance of *"Hochoo,"* whereat a dark girl rose from the group and led the way across the yard to a low house entered through a dark archway. Sin Chang and Jerry, following, found themselves in a small stone-paved room where a young woman sat reading by the uncertain light afforded through a back window. She looked up as they entered, but did not remove her feet from their elevated position on the top rung of a high stool, nor did she remove from her lips the cigarette which she was evidently enjoying to the last puff.

"Hello, Sin," she called. "Welcome as ever. I'd about given you up and resigned myself to the Turkish gentleman as the Lord's will."

"Missy," rumbled Sin Chang in his beard, "this Mister Household—Japanese make plenty try to catch. Know

too much about Japanese. Too much friend China, Korea, other countree. I hide him, bring here to keep out of danger. Go back home with me, with you."

Constance Farley held out a hand to her pupil, and said: "Yes, I see!"

But Jerry who noted that it was a slender white hand, who noted also the blue eyes and brown hair of the girl and a most seductive laziness in the tone of her voice, said to himself: "Missionary's daughter, indeed! She sees a number of things her late-lamented father never even suspected."

Meantime she was critically surveying the tall, dirty priest before her with his scraggy beard and ragged clothes. Uncanny, this pseudo priest, whose eyes, which should have been dull and fishy, were bright and laughing.

"You have taken a large contract," she said, addressing Jerry. "What is your own country?"

"I am English," he answered, "and it isn't the sort of thing you think. Not at all! I'm not a reformer or—or that sort of thing, you see. I just fell into this by accident, and when I saw what was up I had to go on with it."

"Well, what *was* up?" she asked, lighting another cigarette, while she studied his face.

"You see, I've been living for a number of years in Japan," he answered, "and I've been interested in the people—made some very good friends among them. Just by accident I stumbled on a conspiracy hatched by a little

party of government men and just by accident those fellows stumbled upon me. Do you mind if I tap you for a cigarette? I haven't had one in a dog's age. Oh! thanks very much!" as the girl complied with his request. "So here we are!"

"So here we are," she repeated, "but why are we here?"

"Isn't one place as good as another?" he challenged. "The company is what counts."

She laughed her soft, lazy laugh that was not at all American, not at all missionary: "That's why I sent for Sin Chang; the company was that of a Turkish gentleman so attentive that I got scared. You can keep English and Americans at arm's length—if you wish to—but Turkish—perhaps this one is insane."

Jerry shook his head: "Quite sane. Any court would acquit him on the evidence."

"Then you, too, have no sense of humor? And what can you know of the evidence?"

"I've seen the evidence," he answered lightly. "The prisoner is discharged."

"There's the man," she answered, flicking her ash on to the stone floor. "You always stand by each other. Women—never stand by each other!"

"That reminds me," Jerry said, "I sent a letter ten days ago to an old friend near Nanking, telling her of my little scrape and its bearing on China, and asked her if she should reply to send it here in care of the British Consul."

"I take you to him now," Sin Chang rumbled, for this

was the first sentence of the interview which he could understand.

As they went out again into the sunlight Jerry looked back to see Constance Farley calmly absorbed again in book and cigarette, oblivious of the existence of men in the world.

But Jerry couldn't see that, instead of reading, she was wondering what he looked like shaved, clothed and in his right mind. It was thus improved that he made his official call a few hours later.

The British Consul welcomed them. A wealthy and influential Chinese, Mr. Ko-Yiang, had been for two days waiting to see Mr. Householder at Cho-sen Hotel.

So his letter to Esther Landon had brought immediate results; Esther Landon, who refused him many years ago, but had nevertheless been sufficiently interested to keep up the acquaintance by occasional correspondence. And this was that wealthy friend of whom she had told him in several letters, her prince!

After the interview Jerry had to admit that Esther was right: Mr. Ko was certainly a very impressive man; not easily carried away, but intensely devoted to his own country, keenly alive to the danger of its being swallowed up by some better organized government.

"Then Mrs. Landon was good enough to interest you in this little conspiracy," Jerry said after the first greetings.

"You are—er—intimate friend of the lady—Eh?" Mr. Ko parried.

"A very old friend," Jerry corrected him.

"And is not the friendship as the wine, so much the older, so much the dearer?"

"Some friendships," Jerry admitted, "but others are like the old coat that is our most comfortable: we know where it is patched, where friction has worn it thin, and we are careful to hide its defects."

The eyes of Mr. Ko-Yiang narrowed and darkened, lifting at the outer corners, into a quizzical expression as he pressed his point:

"We spoke only of one particular friendship. Is this friendship a—garment?"

"Her prince!" Jerry said, but not aloud. "And jealous!"

Aloud he said: "No, not a garment, a choice bit of old fabric tucked away in camphor—but possessing beauty and warmth," he added as an afterthought.

Mr. Ko, having thus discovered that the Englishman was not afraid of him or his topic, dropped it with characteristic cleverness, and discussed at length the business in hand. It had become quite evident that the little conspiracy had been nipped in the bud, that however desirable to Japan might be its object, other nations would never allow its attainment. It was an ill-advised scheme at best, but Mr. Ko did not at once confide his information or his opinion to his new acquaintance. He might find uses for this resolute Englishman. So with promises of further correspondence and expressions of good will they parted next day, Mr. Ko's final comment be-

ing: "Investigation is not wasted. You find perhaps what you seek, perhaps not. Something is there. You find that."

Whether this should be regarded as occult or commonplace, Jerry couldn't tell—in fact, didn't care. He was sorry to see any excitement dying down. The one thing in life he hated was monotony.

CHAPTER IX

THERE are various ways to avoid monotony. A detour through the fair fields of self-indulgence is probably the commonest. Jerry Householder thought he had tried them all; he was yet to learn others.

To start a missionary's daughter on her homeward journey to America, despite the too ardent devotion of a rich and influential Turk, was a very simple business, backed by so resolute a native as Sin Chang. In fact the enterprise began so tamely that Jerry wondered a little whether he hadn't been cowardly to run away from Japan.

As they rode their bullocks in the early morning, through the quiet streets of Seoul, Constance Farley pointed to a shop open to the street where a cabinetmaker was at work.

"There," she said, "that's why we fail to understand the Oriental mind."

A young woman stood just outside to watch the carpenter at his work. She wore the little white jacket which, complying with Korean modesty, covers the neck and shoulders down to the breasts, which are left bare.

Sin Chang who hung on every word of his teacher turned to look. He saw nothing but the ancient city wall far off where it climbed among the hills and presently

was lost again. Strange, strange the talk of such a woman, and very hard to follow!

Jerry saw the young woman, but before he spoke he cast another look at Constance's face, checking the words that were on his lips.

"What a lesson he offers to American missionaries!" Constance went on. "We come here to preach Push, which is our slogan. See that carpenter; he draws the plane towards him. Ours pushes the plane. His chisel must be drawn; even his saw has a straight handle, and its teeth are set to cut towards the workman. Our work is all coarser and rougher in consequence."

"Yes," Jerry agreed. "Push wins in your country. Pull wins here. Equally sinful."

"That doesn't concern me," she said. "I'm no reformer. Nothing is so thrilling as delightful sinning."

"Delightful sinning?" he repeated doubtfully.

"Why, yes. Of course, a tea and toast sinner isn't nearly so exciting as a champagne and partridge sinner."

"I'm not so sure of that; one of the best parties I remember—" Here he broke off to ask: "How are you about taking fences?"

It was her turn to look askance. Just what did he mean? "I might trip on the top bar," she answered lightly, "but I'd make a desperate effort to get over."

They had come to where a small boy officiated as miller at a roadside mill. The huge stone roller, cut in conical shape, revolved slowly on a flat millstone over which it was impelled by the eternal tramping of a blindfolded

donkey walking his little circle round and round hitched to a long beam that creaked under the strain. The tired beast paused; the boy prodded him with a sharp stick, and the poor jaded thing responded once more to the goad.

"How cruel!" Constance shuddered, but Jerry, already dismounted, had gone over to the boy bribing him with a few coppers to give the donkey a rest and a drink.

"Thank you," Constance said as they resumed their journey. "We can love Mercy, even if we hate Goodness."

But the mighty Sin Chang could understand the man's action no better than the conversation which merely batted words back and forth: Push and pull, sinfulness and fences! What strange things educated people talk about! Sin Chang pondered, but could make nothing of it. And why should this game with words result in making these two people such good friends, when the man hadn't once kissed her, crushing her in his strong embrace! How often he had longed thus for the teacher, yet feared to make the first advance. And this game of words—no, he could never hope to learn it—but she had never smiled at him with the same look she flung at this Anglish!

No wonder Sin Chang was silent as they left by the Nandaimon gate, following the trail up into the bleak mountains. The man said: "We are getting in quite deep," to which the teacher had replied:

"When you meet strange women it's far safer to have the conversation too deep than too broad."

"What is this conversation?" the Korean wondered.

"It may be deep or broad. It seems to be like a river."

They made a strange trio riding in single file, the giant in the lead dressed as usual in coarse white, his black head surmounted by a tiny hat of glazed black metal perforated like a fly trap, in shape the replica of a French "topper," but so small it must be tied on at a rakish angle cocked over the left ear; just the thing for a comic opera chorus, this little hat worn only by married men, worn perhaps as a protection for the spinster that she might not be deceived. Certainly it could afford no protection to the wearer's head.

So they rode, Jerry bringing up the rear. Far off to the south the gray mountains towered spectral in the slanting light of a rising sun. No sound save the sighing of the wind through a gully and the clatter of small stones rolling from beneath the bullocks' feet, for the teacher and the Englishman had tired of shouting or were taking time to think up another rally of words.

At noon they stopped an hour for tiffin and rest. In the afternoon the path grew steeper. The bullocks slipped and stumbled dangerously. Once all three, terrified at the snapping of a twig, stopped short and Constance's turned directly about, prepared to run. Sin Chang, however, brought them to terms with a native malediction, more awful than the prowling creature whose scent had betrayed him.

"Was that why you raised your gun to your shoulder?" Constance asked, and the giant looking back showed his long yellow teeth as he answered:

"Some minutes I smell the big cat. I keep ready so if he jumps I kill first."

At night they camped by a stream, but thoughts of the tiger kept Constance wide awake. Up there so far above her hung the smiling face of the moon. How many and how varied the scenes upon which that moon looked down so calmly. How much of life and death, joy and sorrow, comedy and tragedy, endlessly repeated, century after century.

Was it because the old moon was burnt out that she could look on forever unmoved?

Late in the afternoon of the next day the travellers, weary with a long day's journey, gained the summit of the last ridge. In a plateau just before them goats were pastured. Beyond the pasture a young woman climbed a narrow path, bearing two heavy pails that swung from a yoke across her shoulders. She was pretty and graceful; so much Constance took in even from that distance.

A huge black dog, lithe as a panther, followed close at the girl's heels.

One more valley, one more hill and they had come to Sin Chang's home. In the dark doorway stood Yisan leaning against the jamb, radiant in youth and a lavender silk scarf. She smiled a welcome to the returned Englishman. Suddenly she caught sight of the woman. A black cloud passed over the joyous, smiling face. Yisan, the beautiful, had given place to a fierce, wild creature who could hate, jealous of any rival. Her dark blazing eyes, ignoring her lawful spouse, flashed defiance at the

Englishman. Their hostility to the new arrival was not even veiled.

Jerry saw it, but to his surprise Sin Chang paid no heed to it, seemed averse to comparing the two women so different in type and breeding, for he never so much as glanced toward his wife, nor she at him.

Constance had scarcely dismounted when the girl sprang at her, clutching her by the hair while with her free hand she tore her cheek with the vicious scratch of tough nails. In a second Jerry had seized both her hands and held her in a grip of iron. Blood ran down Constance's cheek; her hair hung loose and disordered. With a tiny wisp of handkerchief she tried to stop the bleeding, but she uttered no word; no sound of protest or of pain.

Yisan was panting hard in her struggle to break free—not that mere restraint distressed her. She was well used to the rough ways of man; it was his right. But to go to her rival's defence! Why, the foreigner was larger than she. What need, what excuse, for taking her part!

Murder was in Yisan's savage heart; it glowed in two coals of fire from her fierce eyes. It choked the very breath she tried to breathe, gripping her throat with its hot fingers.

Sin Chang seemed not to notice that anything was amiss. There were his bullocks to be driven back into their little yard and fed and watered. One must not neglect his live stock.

The great black dog stood by, wrinkling his nose at the smell of blood and of strange human beings. His

eyes sought his master's face, for there his laws were written.

"Missy follow me," Sin Chang said. "I show where the brook runs by the shed to wash the face." Smiling her thanks, Constance followed him.

Jerry released one of Yisan's hands and dragged her, still half resisting, through the dark doorway into the hut. Once inside, without warning, her free arm, encircled his neck. Passionately she embraced him, holding him tight. Words she whispered, words utterly strange to him, but their meaning he could not fail to understand.

"I cannot," he said, putting her from him. "Your husband has befriended me."

A puzzled frown furrowed her brow. The words meant nothing; the action and the motive alike were outside her comprehension. Ah! it was because of the foreign woman. She must first reckon with her!

The strangely assorted little family had finished supper; the two men had drunk of a fiery liquor which the host had produced in a huge jug lifted from a deep hole beneath the floor. Under its smarting warmth the Englishman had relaxed more and more into the laughing, careless and care-free boy whom his comrades in the war had nicknamed "Smile."

Sin Chang insisted on harking back to his wife's reception of "Missy" despite Jerry's effort to divert his thoughts to a pleasanter channel.

The girl understood only too well, and sought by little

attentions to placate her giant spouse. She brought his long pipe, filled it with tobacco of his own growing, carried a taper lighted from the fire. He sat tipped back on a heavy oak stool. Without seeming to change his posture he took Yisan by the nape of the neck, as one lifts a kitten, and held her out at arm's length, where he proceeded to pinch her ears, talking to her all the while in a low voice in the Korean tongue:

"So you take upon yourself to bite and scratch, mayhap some day to kill *my* guests, *my* friends. You! who are nothing in the world but my wife—my first wife, for I shall have other wives; as many as I wish so many shall I have."

The girl, who was moaning with pain, attempted no reply. He shook her in his mighty grip; her head hung forward. She was fast losing consciousness. The man seemed not to realize his own roughness, or he had grown reckless of this his property.

Then Constance Farley spoke—gently but firmly, close beside him within easy reach of his great arm: "Sin Chang," she said, "you must not hurt her. She does not understand."

Her hand lay on his shoulder gently restraining him. He looked up into the deep blue eyes so steady, so fearless of him. A flush of red surged over his face and neck. Without a word he dropped Yisan, who fell limp and quivering at his feet. Her head swam and rang with the cries of all the furies; but humble, submissive, as the whipped dog, she lay where he had dropped her.

Jerry stepped over her as he went out to his bed in the yard with the cattle. Constance, stooping, patted the aching head very gently, brushing back the disordered hair from the dark forehead. If Yisan understood sympathy she did not acknowledge it by so much as a sigh. Terror she knew, terror of this fierce giant whose hand might kill her with one hasty blow.

The moon looking in, long after, saw only a deserted, silent room and a young woman lying face down on the gray stone floor.

CHAPTER X

It was the noon hour; the long bar of the Shanghai Club was crowded. Bartenders were busy shaking cocktails, drawing forth from mysterious hiding places under the bar bottles of Scotch whisky or rye. Occasionally an old man would call for the brandy of "the good old days," meaning the days when he was young. But the obliging bartender could find brandy also, or the sherry and bitters that preceded American cocktails in British favor.

The refreshing clink of ice shaken; the smoke of cigarettes; the laughter of men released for a little from the stress and worry of business; men shaking hands with the welcome of old friends long parted; men going up or going down the broad stone stairs of the club house; men arriving by ricksha, all eager because of the pleasure of meeting other men, partly also because of that long bar. Boards on the wall opposite the bar contained all the latest news of money and stocks, of horse racing, of the sailings of ships. A crowd was about these boards gleaning the world's latest cabled news. At the far end of the room two tall men drank whisky in long glasses. They leaned upon the bar, the fair man as though it were a habit to stand thus with one foot upon the brass rail, one elbow on the bar. The dark man was the only Chin-

ese in all the motley throng of foreigners. Quite at his ease in any surroundings, he none the less was making an effort to maintain the proper attitude and at the same time his dignity.

Mr. Ko-Yiang was speaking in his usual calm, authoritative style:

"When I telegraphed you it seemed I might have for you information of importance. Now—I do not know—It would be best you should wait to see. Excuse, but have you money enough?"

"Thanks, so much!" Jerry answered. "I have from my mother enough to live on in comfort though not in luxury. I am quite all right."

"And this young lady who comes with you," Mr. Ko added; "secretary is it, or stenographer?"

"Nothing whatsoever. A missionary's daughter who wanted to see Shanghai; the most unconventional woman I ever saw. American—which may account for it. I explained how people would say—well, the worst if you like——"

"And this did not stop her?"

"She only laughed—said she was descended from Cæsar's wife—and added: 'will you take me along?' She's jolly good company and all that——"

"I should like much to meet her. You'll come and dine tonight at eight-thirty to see once more your—friend, Mrs. Landon. Bring this Miss——?"

"Farley, Constance Farley. I'll extend the invitation with pleasure. You understand I cannot dress; I have

ordered clothes, but at present these are all I have."

"It has no bearing. If you will excuse: the dress of men reduces to what your mathematicians call common denominator. I should prefer more individual style."

This remark came back to Jerry Householder when the quartet had met in the house at Bubbling Well Road. Individual style seemed the key note of the company.

Constance, who had brought from Seoul her entire wardrobe in a great bag, wore a soft green crepe so nearly Grecian in outline that it could never be quite out of style.

Esther had chosen from her host's bountiful supply a true Chinese yellow silk. She wore his gift, the jade necklace. Her eyes sparkled with the excitement of pitting against each other her former and her present adorers, while at the same time it was necessary to test her own charms against those of a new rival, one who she saw at the first glance might be a very dangerous antagonist.

A strangely assorted, strangely contrasting company these four: Constance much the larger of the two women, the Irish type with her brown hair, blue eyes and white skin; Esther far more French than English, petite, dark, brilliant, her vivacity in marked contrast to the other's laziness.

At the first glance each saw that she had the advantage in age: Constance because Mrs. Landon was only a girl of twenty-five and Esther because Miss Farley was a woman no longer young, probably thirty.

"Jerry tells me you've been devoting your life to mis-

sionary work in Korea," Esther began the conversation.

"How extremely inaccurate he is!" the other answered. "I never even tried that sort of thing. I don't know how."

"But—I thought this great Korean hunter where you and he had been visiting was your protegé, a convert to Christianity."

"A pupil in English and—a few other things," Constance explained. "A convert only in that sense, but a very loyal friend."

Then it was the host's turn. It seemed to Constance that he held her hand like a Frenchman. His eyes expressed—was it wonder, or admiration? Whatever it was her mind flew back to that insistent Turk in Seoul. What strange creatures men were! So utterly different from women.

"You have come to study Chinese character?" he asked, raising his eyes in a way that seemed to her cynical.

"I haven't come here to study anything," was her answer. "It seemed a pity to go back to America without ever having set foot in China."

"America is China's friend," he said, assenting to her proposition with a nod.

"It seems traditional; after Boxer Rebellion of 1900 Germany looted the inmost shrines of the sacred city of Peking. She carried off art treasures priceless in value, even the ancient bronze astronomical instruments from the walls. Japanese wantonly defaced the marble pagoda and temples."

"England—wasn't England your friend?"

"England was—England: honorable, honest—but England left unrepaired the breach in her legation walls made by the cannon from the inner city. And over that breach they have painted in black letters: 'Lest we forget.'"

"And my country?" she asked.

"Your state secretary, John Hay, sent us back the moneys paid for indemnity to found American Indemnity College, where two hundred of our young men and women are taught English language and American ideals —or is it ideas? Either way it is a noble memorial of a great nation's friendship."

"I feel very proud of that splendid record," Constance said, "for I should have to confess skepticism as to our ideals."

"Are they not the same as the French: Liberty; Equality; Brotherhood?"

"On medals perhaps. But in real life, I'm afraid, Money, Speed and Advertising come much nearer the sad truth."

"Ah!" he exclaimed with evident relish. "This means influence of the so beautiful women."

At the mention of beauty his dark eyes carefully appraised her from head to foot and back again to head, where, encountering a challenge from her, they smiled their evident appreciation. An immediate result it seemed to her was that Mr. Ko clapped his hands twice, whereupon a boy appeared with cigarettes and a most delectable drink which tasted like a sweet cocktail and, as Jerry

confided to Esther, was strong enough to spin the head of a bridge.

"But there are no bridges present," she answered. "There comes the old quizzical look you had as a boy. What now?"

"It's too early in the game to say there are no bridges," he said. "Bridges are what carry us over a depression—or an obstacle—very useful at times."

"Then this drink is the bridge and I should say you'd mixed your metaphor if I didn't see that what you're trying for is to get a dig at Ko-Yiang. Well, I'll admit he is my bridge and he's carrying me over a serious depression. Jerry, I made a mistake to marry Peter. He's a poor man and I must have prosperity, or slump."

The solemn sound of a gong warned that dinner was served.

The long table gleamed in the soft, shaded light. There was no cloth; the beautifully polished teak wood furnished a rich background for the silver, the blue and white Canton china, the elaborate dishes of ivory set in a silver network.

Four boys in long blue blouses, white breeches and sandals waited noiselessly, faultlessly. It was almost more like an English dinner than Chinese: there were quail and grouse following an indescribable Chinese soup; there was the inevitable bread and cheese, and there were *li-tchi* nuts, mangoes and truly Oriental sweets overpowering in their sweetness. The wine of the country was displaced by excellent sherry and champagne. Over their heads

waved slowly the punkah keeping the air in motion. With the lazy creak mingled the subdued patter of sandal-shod feet. The composite smell that is the Orient pervaded even here. All these things influenced the conversation, drifting in like indolent manner.

Mr. Ko, leaving Esther to the Englishman, was devoting himself to the American girl. His intention had been thus to give himself an opportunity to watch Esther with her former lover. It might be to torture himself with the revelation that they still cared for each other, that this lovely English woman so complaisant toward him was far better pleased with her own countryman. It hurt to suspect that she loved his money, not him.

At first he had watched them jealously, but that was before the lithe figure, the soft brown hair, the deep gray eyes, the lazy indifference of his newest guest had roused his interest. No woman of her type had ever come his way before. The mad desire for possession crowded every other thought into the background.

Was she utterly indifferent? Impossible with those eyes and the little lines showing faintly at their corners. Impossible with that indolent seduction in every movement, in every articulation, every tone of her voice! Impossible with that mouth, those full lips, those sensitive nostrils—a woman meant for loving!

So, as he watched and speculated, he even forgot that other couple at his elbow chatting of old days before the great war, of an old love that once had burnt so bright.

Had it burned itself out, or was it only smouldering?

Other thoughts had driven out that question for the present.

The American leaned back in her chair with such perfect relaxation one could not associate her with that hustling nervous race. Her long, tapering, white arm stretched out to toy with the cigarette which she seemed to be examining at arm's length so intently was her gaze fixed upon that burning point, but it was not of that she spoke.

"There's a lot of nonsense in poetry and prose about women. We aren't so different from men."

"But more skilful," he insisted, "more finesse, more delicate touch. Is it not?"

"P'raps. But, when we see what we want—we take it."

"Sometimes—are you not in doubt? Eve of your tradition knew not her fondness for apples until she had bitten one."

"Yes, but remember it was she, not Adam, who had the courage to try it."

"The legend, if I recall, says nothing to indicate Adam had acquired the snake language. He knew not of apples."

"Did you ever think"—and now at last her eyes turned very slowly from her cigarette to him—"how many poor mortals on their death beds wake up to realize what they've missed because they didn't even know the language?"

"I thought this to be true only of men."

"Men!" she repeated. "Men worry about the things they've done. Women about the chances they've missed."

Ah, this was good news; it looked decidedly hopeful. He must encourage her along this line:

"So the wise woman is she who takes the chances, who welcomes the pleasure when it comes."

"There aren't any wise women," she answered. "Even those five in the parable who illuminated for another girl's bridegroom—were wise only by comparison."

"The wise woman," he said ignoring the unfamiliar reference, "is at least she who is not bound by convention."

Esther Landon, who had been lending one ear to this conversation, found here her cue:

"Convention! I don't know what people in America are like, but those at home may all go hang, with their Jane Austen ideas of woman's sphere! I'm not going to tread the straight and narrow way to please a pack of dead and dying—relics of the middle ages."

"Straight and narrow?" Mr. Ko repeated, "and what is this way?"

"You tell him, Miss Farley," Esther prompted. "I think it's more in your line."

Constance smilingly complied: "Why, you see, Mr. Ko, it's the little turnstile by which souls may enter Heaven—in single file—whereas they go arm in arm, as many as you like, to Perdition."

"I have never liked the crowds," he said complacently. "Much better one, two, or three."

"Why better?" Esther interrupted. "I like to see people. What does a woman dress for? Why try to look

your best unless you are to be seen, to live among people?"

"We have a saying," Ko-Yiang answered, "'pigs in every yard; dogs in every street; friends only in one's heart.' Thus one protests there is not room for—the multitude."

"My heart is a big place," she flung back. "It has room for any number of nice people. Of course they must be nice people."

"Generalities!" Jerry said. "What you really mean is that you like so many people a little it isn't possible for you to care very deeply about one."

At this sally Ko-Yiang shot her a quick glance seeming to ask her to deny it.

She only laughed and shook her head, exclaiming: "And this from you, Jerry, of all people!"

"Yes, of all people," he answered. "You remind me of that inscription in my sister's autograph album by one of her dear school friends: 'Drop one link in friendship's chain for me.'"

This was too subtle for Mr. Ko, who only blinked from one to the other while he tried to find Constance's hand under cover of the table. Whether she knew it or not, she elected that very moment to lean both elbows on the table.

Coffee was served in the great living room, where were yellow vases of the Ming period, carvings such as are no longer possible, for, when they were made, the carver worked for three cents a day and lived on rice.

Here the four were farther separated when Ko-Yiang took Miss Farley into the conservatory to see a miniature aquarium stocked with rare specimens.

Over a chair lay a mandarin's coat of plum colored satin marvellously embroidered in peach blow and gold, a gem for any collection.

"How beautiful!" Constance exclaimed.

"It would make extremely good blend with your coloring," Mr. Ko added, and picking it up threw it about her shoulders, then stood off to admire. "Yes; it is so well and becomingly placed you must keep it."

"But, Mr. Ko, how could I accept such a gift? It is very kind of you, but——"

"No, my dear lady; I shall feel much hurt if you will not honor me to take such trifling present. It has no value."

Now, Constance knew, any woman would know, that it must be very valuable, but she who hasn't been tempted by such bait has no right to criticize. And Constance, though lacking a mirror, hadn't long to wait before she was able to note from one angle the effect her present produced. When they rejoined the two old friends who had seemed so pleased at their unexpected reunion no thought was farther from Constance's mind than a desire to upset the equilibrium of the little dinner party. But at the first sight of that costly antique worn so complacently by the new arrival, a stranger from a strange land, fire flashed from Esther Landon's dark eyes, the fire of a jealousy so fierce that it had lost the sense of shame.

How like she was to that other woman back there in the mountains of Korea, the untamed Yisan, who would learn only in the hard school of experience!

There is an unmistakable satisfaction in discovering that you are the cause and occasion of envy in others. That Mrs. Landon was plainly jealous of her did not disturb Constance; it only added zest to the little flirtation with that unusual man, her host.

Mr. Ko with the amateur's instinct for values looked inquiringly from one woman to the other. Nothing escaped him; he saw the jealousy, knew the reason, knew the type of human beings who glory in sharing that emotion with the cat family and a host of others. Of the other woman's type he knew less. What would rouse that indolent nature? What would result if it were roused? He determined then and there that he would find the answer to these questions. It would be a very entertaining study and experiment. In those large eyes so blue and so white he could see neither scorn nor anger. Apparently the American had not even observed the expression which had roused his interest and added to his enjoyment.

Then Constance Farley spoke. Her voice was pleasing, but the words were drawled, lingering on her lips, "It is very sweet of you to insist, Mr. Ko, and—the temptation to yield is so strong that—I accept."

"Ko-Yiang," Esther said with an effort to appear disinterested, "is a child. My dear, I am positively frightened as his guest here to praise anything. He would give anyone the half of his kingdom if he asked for it."

"If he asked for it, yes"—Constance assented. "But if he didn't ask or even hint—would you compel him to accept it?" she finished, turning to him.

"Ancient poets," he said, apparently ignoring the question, "have written: 'No woman understands herself.' When I read this I said: 'Ah, this explains.' Since then I have never even tried to understand many things."

Half an hour later when Jerry left Constance at her hotel she surprised him with the question, "Do you think our host of this evening is—something of a flirt?"

"No," he replied, "he is Chinese. An Englishman might have been flirting. The Chinese is ready at any time to add another to his collection."

"So I," she exclaimed indignantly, "am—a specimen?"

"Which he has under careful consideration. If Mrs. Landon thought for an instant that her beauty and charm had obtained a monopoly—poor child!"

"Good-night—and thank you," came on the instant from Constance Farley.

"I wonder," he thought as he turned away, "is she also getting caught in the same golden web?"

CHAPTER XI

It was delightful under the sycamore trees in the Public Garden. Sunshine danced on the water where the usual number of craft of all sorts darted here and there or made their way slowly with the dignity of big ships. A boat was coming ashore from the river steamer just in from her long run.

Esther watched the little launch. It might be bringing some one from the neighborhood of her own home, that dreary place from which she had run away to escape monotony—as if anyone could escape monotony when human life itself at best is a monotone with occasional excursions above or below the key!

Even Esther was not sure that she had really escaped monotony; after the first two weeks her present life varied little from day to day. She also feared at times that her own sameness rather bored her self-indulgent host. In fact, Esther was not quite so sure of herself and several other things as she had been a month ago. Concert pitch she found, however inspiring, may yet prove after a while something of a strain.

It was delightful sitting there in the broad shade of the sycamores, but the slender foot kicked petulantly all

the pebbles within her reach, and her expression suggested anything but contentment. Always a tiny doubt would obtrude itself, questioning whether this was worth the cost. More than once in the darkness and solitude of the night Peter's image had arisen to vex her, never angry—that she could have borne—but appealing mutely as the whipped dog looks into his master's eyes, not cringing—only beseeching a fairer treatment in return for so much love and devotion.

With daylight all this seemed childish nonsense. Now, despite the soft air, the grateful shade, the colorful sights along the water front, the wealth lavished upon her, she was not on good terms with life and its gay trinity: the world, the flesh and the devil.

That little man up forward in the launch reminded her of poor old Peter; had just his habit of standing like an old man, with his hands clasped behind his back, or, as she had derisively described it to Peter himself, like an aged cab horse falling asleep in the shafts. He had taken his hat off and the breeze blew his thin hair back from his forehead. She couldn't see the veins at his temples, he was too far away, but she could imagine them just like Peter's. Probably, like Peter, this man also when embarrassed would fuss about his coat collar, hitching it up in the back. Queer things, men; so helpless and dependent on women's care.

In the midst of this reverie Jerry Householder came, tall, resolute, so full of life and energy that he drove out every thought of that little man in the launch who

wasn't resolute, who needed love and care far more than this big fellow ever could need them.

He needn't have had so little tact as to ask: "Where is everybody?" as though she didn't count.

"I suspect she's off somewhere with Ko-Yiang," she answered.

When he hadn't taken a seat on the bench beside her she added: "You were fond of me once, Jerry. Have you forgotten?"

"No, but I take it that's the great difference between the sexes in accomplishment."

"Oh! Really! Men are so superior!"

"Well, call it what you will, a man says: That's past —what next? and goes ahead to something else."

"You mean some*one* else."

"A woman," he continued, ignoring her corrections, "sits by the corpse of last night to talk it over, twist it this way and that, photograph it and paste it into her album. She wants to live everything over two or three times. While she is doing that a man is going on to what comes next."

"Really, Jerry, you've grown very patronizing. And it includes all of my unfortunate sex? Is that it?"

"No, that's not it. It includes the average. It should warn a certain woman not to allow herself to slip down into that class."

"I don't know anything about averages. I asked if you'd forgotten that you once cared for me, and—I drew a lecture on the inferiority of woman."

"Which was another way," he caught her up, "of saying that I let bygones remain bygones. When I open up a tomb it will not be my own."

"Well, your figure of speech flatters my vanity, anyway: the buried hopes of yesterday."

"While you are living in today, I had almost said 'strictly'."

"Why the mean stab?" she asked.

"Because it's amusing to see you on the wrong end of the halter, no longer the leader but the led."

"And have you seen so much as that?" She could not keep down the color as she asked the question. Something brought back the image of that little man standing so forlorn up forward in the launch. And it might be Peter. Nothing strange in his coming to look for her. The launch had landed its passengers. They had scattered and gone. One of them had strolled aimlessly to the north side of the town, where an old stone bridge crosses the Whang-poo. He leaned idly against a parapet and watched the crowding boats below him, all so eager to reach their journey's end, unload, and begin another journey. Sampans, junks with masts unstepped to go under the bridge. Such a throng! Women and children poling or laboring together at the long oar. Poverty pinched to yield barely food enough to keep life going, raiment enough to cover half their bodies—toil, endless, hard, unrelenting—with starvation hovering vulture-like just over them—yet they kept on, kept on, because of that vulture hovering—just over them.

"No wonder," thought the man on the bridge, "that these Chinese never laugh—there's nothing to laugh at."

An old man crouching close beside him offered for sale two fishes, weak, anæmic and half dead, that floated, pretending to swim, in a shallow tub.

With characteristic squeal a barrow came over the bridge, the water seller offering typhoid germs in liquid, quite harmless to the natives, who have acquired unbelievable immunity through centuries of culture.

The little man with a shudder turned away from the river, from the water seller drawing off a measure for a woman with many children, from the crowding boats and the huddling families that lived in them. He chose Fokien Road, where fish markets complained to Heaven and all others of sensitive perception that their fish were not fresh, hadn't been fresh for many days, past stalls where yellow and brown ducks hung in rows glistening with varnish, cooked meats that would keep for weeks if need be before they were sold, easily dusted by reason of their shiny surface. He had to dodge a barrow piled so high with crates of live poultry—ducks and geese—that it seemed to approach along the narrow road by its own volition.

A lovely little dark-eyed girl dodged behind the barrow to avoid meeting the foreigner face to face. There's something so inferior about foreigners! Even this ragged, bare-footed child felt it, although she was too ignorant to understand that poverty was the reason why her

country didn't send out missionaries to convert such people.

The peculiar chant of the dry goods vendor rose above the jumble of other sounds, the jargon of many districts, the cries of children, the grunt of porters, sweating under a two horse load of heavy cases. Everywhere color, red and gold, blue and yellow and the haze of crowded life and constant motion.

It was confusing to one who had lived so long back in the country. Peter Landon, standing still to make sure that he hadn't lost his way, took off his hat, letting his thin hair straggle down on his forehead. A woman, European or American, came from a little shop directly in front of him, hesitated a moment, then asked: "Nanking Road—it is this way, to the right? I'm a bit confused coming out of the shop into all this again."

She had a nice face. At first glance Peter liked those blue eyes and her perfectly frank smile.

"I'm going that way myself," he assured her, though he hadn't known it until she smiled at him. "May I—may I offer to——"

"I should be very much obliged," she answered, not waiting for him to finish his question. He was such a sad little figure,—any woman would long to mother him, to give him some little happiness to drive that hunted, hungry look from his sad eyes. What tragedy could he be living, she wondered; and were the police already on his trail?

"This city is so unlike anything I've ever known," she said, for the man seemed to need encouragement if they were not to walk in silence.

"I have lived for several years in Seoul."

"Seoul," he repeated, "never been there. It's a fine city, isn't it?"

"Interesting," she assented, "but my father was a missionary there. We didn't see much of the real life."

"No. I suppose not. You'd have to lead the life of a —a—" He hesitated, afraid to say what he had in mind.

But she helped him, "Yes, interlopers and parasites."

"I didn't mean anything so harsh as that," he insisted.

"No, probably not. But that's your opinion of all missionaries, isn't it?"

"Sorry," he answered, and she could tell by his voice that they were getting on nicely together, "but if we are to exchange confidences we should be introduced. My name is Landon—Peter Landon."

"Then is your wife the Mrs. Landon visiting here, whom I have met at Ko-Yiang's?"

It seemed to her that the man winced at this question. She was sorry that she had asked it when she saw the pained look in his face. He didn't answer except to repeat the name, Ko-Yiang. Something in the tone of his voice told her that he had come in search of his wife, and that the association of her name with Ko-Yiang's was confirming his worst fears.

She liked Peter Landon. It was difficult to picture him as the husband of the vivacious Esther.

Before she could really get acquainted with him they had come out onto the Bund, crossed to the Public Garden, where they stumbled upon Esther in animated conversation with Jerry and Ko-Yiang. Esther was defending her attitude as to money, which she maintained was valueless until spent. How silly, therefore, to hoard it!

Mr. Ko seemed much amused, lolling on the seat beside her, while Householder, standing, towered in front of them, so occupied in the attempt to reform his old friend, that he failed to notice the two who had stopped within a few yards of them.

"Money doesn't bring happiness," Jerry was saying.

"No," Esther granted, "it just buys the things that do bring it."

"Nonsense, child, you are disputing an axiom."

"Well, axioms ought to be disputed. They all need proving, and most of them are wrong."

"Then you'd even deny that two and two are four?"

"Decidedly. I've always secretly doubted it. Some day a bright scientist is going to show the world that arithmetic is nonsense. And then I'm going to be able to balance my bank book and pay most of my bills."

"Ver-y good logic," Mr. Ko exclaimed. "A lovely woman need never believe in mathematics; rather in the comfortable saying of your Scripture; With Gold all things are possible."

"Oh, I say—" Jerry protested—but seeing that Esther hadn't even noticed, probably didn't know that Mr. Ko was misquoting, he let it pass unchallenged.

After all, wasn't it nearly true? Wasn't this clever Chinese justified in bringing the Scripture up to date? Who in these days remembers to keep holy the Sabbath Day?

Esther—well, he knew Esther. Smart sounding phrases, clever repartee—these were all she knew of argument.

He caught the twinkle in her eye as she retorted: "But, Ko Ko, what is gold that it can do so much?"

"Gold"—said Mr. Ko, smiling his evident relish of her pet name for him, "gold is the highest and the most desirable medium in human use. Beauty is gold, the very streets of your Heaven are paved with it,——"

"I'm perfectly willing to concede the power of gold," she interrupted, not waiting for him to finish, "but bills and all arithmetic are the curse of civilization."

"But don't you see the inevitable result?" Jerry insisted, ignoring Ko-Yiang's comment as to gold.

"There is no such thing," Esther interrupted. "The inevitable is another senseless tradition. If you're quick you can dodge the inevitable just before it hits you."

While the words were on her lips her husband stood before her, and with him the woman who seemed determined to win the rich Mr. Ko from her—after all that she had sacrificed to get him.

Decidedly things were not going well with Esther Landon. She considered herself unwarrantably injured by this sudden turning up of her husband, a circumstance exaggerated by the added presence of the American woman.

"Why, Peter!" she exclaimed. "What on earth brings you here?" The tone of her voice, the elevation of her chin implied that he was trespassing. It was Constance who answered:

"Your husband was good enough to bring me. I picked him up as I came from the silk shop of Laou Kai Fook, introduced myself, and what does he do but take me directly to his wife!"

The only one of the group who seemed entirely at ease was Mr. Ko. Why Householder should be upset at this, his first sight of Peter Landon since his marriage to Esther, even she could not fathom, but with characteristic egotism she decided it must be due to jealousy. He need no longer be jealous of poor little Peter, who belonged with last year's discarded finery, in the rag bag.

But why should Mr. Ko show such interest in the American woman! Any fool, even a man, might see that this Farley missionary creature was not so good looking as she. And she listened attentively to what the woman was saying for explanation of the look in Mr. Ko's eyes.

"But I'm not so sure that I believe in marriage." That was Constance's answer to some remark of the man, an answer that Jerry at once challenged.

"But what of the human race? You've got to have marriage, you know, and all that sort of thing."

"The human race isn't any of my responsibility," the girl said. "The human race will have to look after itself."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Ko with evident enjoyment.

"Back to Nature. Quite right! Epicurus. Live while you live."

"Call it hedonism," Jerry corrected him. But it was Constance who answered, sticking to her guns:

"Call it all the names you like. It's the emancipation of the weaker sex, which doesn't mean voting. It's the freedom to live her own life—the freedom to do what I've done in coming here with you," she ended, looking Jerry straight in the eyes.

"Will you smoke, my dear?" asked Mr. Ko extending her his cigarette case, and added, too tardily, it seemed to the Englishman—"lady," as if he had intended that from the first.

As she turned to accept, Jerry wondered if she saw what he saw in the man's eyes, the calm appraisal, the unconcealed desire, the appetite whetted by indulgence. If she saw it, it had no visible effect upon her. Could it be, the man wondered, that all women at heart enjoyed that sort of thing! Did they merely draw the line at the confession of it?

Mr. Ko struck a wax taper on his jewelled gold match box, and held the light for her. Could she have failed to see the look of sudden hate flashing from the dark eyes of that other woman upon whom he turned his back!

"These American missionary people," Jerry said, but not aloud: "they're a mystery to me. But then, this girl isn't a missionary at all. She's quite frankly a heathen. And the cause of it—a good deal the same as it was with me: she's seen how hollow it is."

Meantime little Peter Landon, like a lost dog, looked vainly from one to the other. It was all Greek to Peter. They were talking sheer nonsense which no one believed.

And Esther, his Esther, whom he had called his queen and nicknamed Vashti—she was tired of him, had fled to the protection—or was it the splendid luxury—of the rich Mr. Ko.

Peter's new friend stood up and leaned against a sycamore, facing him and the life of the harbor behind him. The smoke of her cigarette hovered in a pretty little white cloud just over her shining brown hair, and she spoke so that he alone could hear: "It will all come right in the end. I know it will."

He could answer only with his eyes. They thanked her. Without a word he turned back, crossed the Bund, and disappeared down Whang-poo Road.

His wife saw him go, but, curiously enough, it was not of him that she was thinking.

It was entirely through her that this strangely assorted company had been brought together.

Her old flame, Jerry Householder, had written her from his retreat in Korea.

The wild man had got going again, only this time she believed he had hit upon something real. She had always had a tender spot in her heart for the man whom she had refused. In fact, more than once she had doubted the wisdom of her choice.

Jerry was quite a dear, the exciting sort, with his

mighty enthusiasms. And Jerry had never married, never shown much attention to any other girl. Well—who could tell? Isn't it the part of wisdom to have more than one string to one's bow?

After she had read his letter a dozen times, she had read between the lines as many ideas which might have been there.

And Jerry needed help. He was attempting to do for China such work as required a trained diplomat. It was quite like him. The only strange feature was that he should have confessed that he found himself floundering, that he was going ahead not knowing in the least where he was going.

Jerry had been growing up, getting wiser with years, with business experience, with the trials of the War. He was still Jerry, but he had moved on.

At first she had assumed that she could do nothing in any way to help him. Of course he hadn't asked for help, had simply written in his straightforward way to his old friend telling of his difficulty, his unwillingness to let go, his inability to do anything by himself. That was all that he had written.

She had to confess to herself that at first it had not been pure friendship for Jerry, nor yet a desire to help him in thwarting a plot against China—which had induced her to tell Mr. Ko about it. Their friendship had come to the point where it would do it no harm to introduce the suggestion of other men friends.

Ko-Yiang was the lordly sort who assumed the impossibility of a rival. If he had ever known such a check to monopoly as a little wholesome competition he had not acknowledged it.

Therefore, it was two birds with a single stone if she could tighten her hold upon him while showing a kind and friendly interest in good old Jerry.

Her heart told her plainly enough that Jerry was far more attractive than Mr. Ko; that there was no possible comparison. But then—Jerry was almost as poor as Peter Landon.

The plan had succeeded beyond her fondest hopes. If Ko-Yiang had a passion outside of self-indulgence it was to make his country great and powerful as it was mighty in area and population.

If China could find her rightful place among the Nations, if she could centralize her government and develop independently of other nations—then such as he would become the ruling class.

Power would be added to his Wealth, and the result would be Fame.

The name of Ko-Yiang would be known the world over, even as that of Sun Yat Sen.

To Mr. Ko's ambition the letter of Jerry Householder seemed to offer the much desired opportunity.

There might be nothing in the plot discovered by this English admirer of Esther Landon.

He could tell much better when he had seen and talked

with the man. It was necessary to trace back to its source the intrigue of the *Ginkakuji* Temple.

Then, it must be admitted, he was exceedingly jealous of his latest acquisition.

Perhaps it was only by accident that she had revealed so warm an affection for this correspondent who was once a lover. Had he a rival, a dangerous rival, in this Englishman whom she had described in such glowing terms?

If so, he planned to bring the two together where he could watch them, could see with his own eyes this blond, handsome cavalier making love to his—his what? Ah! the latest gem in his collection.

There are those who love the agony of tight boots that they may enjoy the intense relief when they are taken off.

Ko-Yiang was one of those. He enjoyed the anguish of jealousy—would have found extreme pleasure if a woman had ventured to treat him with contempt, that he might melt her heart by pity to see such a man suffer.

But such was his dominating side that no woman had ever discovered the secret of this contradictory trait.

He had volunteered to visit Korea, to study the situation for himself. The result had been his early discovery that the plot was harmless, but the man had so impressed him as a rival that he had brought him to Shanghai simply to watch his effect on Esther, to torture himself with the daily sight of his rival.

Naturally a man of such imagination was determined

to win in the end, when he had had time to study his man, to satisfy himself just how much Esther now cared for him.

Such was the state of affairs when the despised Peter came down the river in search of his errant wife. Such was the situation when there came into the life of the cultivated dilettante a woman of a different type from any that he had ever known. Such was the embarrassment within the surprise when he found that what had been the most important object in his life became a matter of secondary importance—secondary to a pair of blue eyes, a soft reluctant voice and a manner as frank as that of a child.

Esther knew all this; instinctively she had understood what was happening, had struggled to thwart it; knew that she had not succeeded. Her one hope lay in the fact that thus far the American didn't even know the havoc she had wrought, was evidently untouched by the influence of the rich, the masterful, the overpowering Mr. Ko.

Esther with a woman's keen perception could see that, whatever the effect on Mr. Ko, the woman herself was either unconscious of or entirely indifferent to his allurements.

But then—the American didn't yet know his princely liberality. When she did, it would be time to say whether she was indifferent or not.

With such uncertainty and doubt to vex her, with the fear that because of her own suggestion the eccentric Ko-Yiang had found more in Korea to interest him than

Jerry Householder's plot, it is no wonder that poor Esther was upset at the unexpected appearance of her husband.

She had sacrificed all that she possessed for Luxury. She didn't even pretend to herself that it was love or accident or compulsion.

She could find ample excuses to justify her conduct. She was sure that it had been done before, thousands of times.

No one was ever certain about such things. Everyone knows those confidences beginning: "Now, my dear, this is strictly confidential," confidences which prove to be nothing but suspicions supported, it is true, by evidence. But evidence isn't proof. No one can prove anything.

Often, in discussing it pro and con with herself, she had floored her *alter ego* in the argument by saying: what is a pretty woman—yes, pretty, unmistakably pretty!—well, what is she to do if she cannot afford clothes, suitable friends, opportunity? Is she to live like a fox on a desert island, content with a hole in the ground? To grow old unseen, unknown, simply to be true to a few thoughtless words repeated at the altar when she didn't suspect what she was doing? No! She would recognize that she had but one life to live, that a woman grows old before she knows it. And she would accept the best way out of it, the way that leads to life—not to burial alive.

It was not a deliberate act of heartlessness, this irritation which led to Esther's slight of the man whom she

had promised to love, honor and obey. He was in her way. If he suspected, he didn't know what price she had paid for Life.

And as for the promise exacted by the marriage service, —how was a woman to promise love at a future date? Could she swear that in twenty years she would still relish a gooseberry tart?

Well, a promise like that was too absurd to bind any one. So she let Peter go—quietly, unobserved, unnoticed as he had come.

Peter, as a topic, could wait. There were other questions just now which couldn't wait. To them she gave her undivided attention.

CHAPTER XII

THE ardor of the polygamist is the ardor of the collector. The dog burying bones, the squirrel hoarding nuts, the miser gold; each exhibits the patient zeal of the collector. To the hunter the joy is in the chase, rather than the killing; to the collector possession is the end as pearl follows pearl upon his string.

And Ko-Yiang, the polygamist, was a collector with the zeal and the persistence of the true hunter, the skill of the specialist and the connoisseur!

After the first interview he had known that the conquest of the American woman would be far harder than he had found it with Peter Landon's discontented wife. There was a woman who loved luxury, who craved admiration, not the closeted admiration of an obscure man however devoted and unselfish he might be, but the sort of admiration that the world would see and envy.

For such admiration if accompanied with opportunity for hitherto unknown luxury, he had seen from his first conversation with her, the charming and attractive Mrs. Landon would pay the necessary price. One need but play upon her weaknesses. To be sure, the player must be wealthy and liberal. Enough! Mr. Ko knew full well that he was both. And in a surprisingly short time

he had won. But now? He was by no means tired of his new acquisition—which made another by so much the harder to accomplish.

It would by no means suit him to lose the vivacious and captivating Esther in order to possess himself of this hitherto unknown variety.

The strange charm of the American had a certain elusiveness. Just when he began to feel sure of success, the prize almost within his grasp—something would happen to show him that she was as far away as ever.

When he reasoned calmly with himself, invariably he attempted to fortify himself against his well known excesses.

It was one thing carefully to analyze a woman, to determine where lay her strength, where her weakness, to lay siege to her heart by a well prepared campaign. He had tried that method and with marked success.

But—it was quite another matter when, as had also happened, his ardent nature ran away with judgment, he lost control of himself, forgot or disregarded strategy, and undertook to storm the citadel.

With some, the very desperation, the abandonment of the rules of the game, the madness—carried them away also. The battle was won by assault.

But the wisdom born of experience cautioned him that to attempt primitive ways with this woman might not only be a mistake, might even lead to disaster.

A strong nature this, if he were any judge, a nature fit to cope with his own. A nature such as, if it could

be tempted sufficiently to yield in voluntary surrender, would tenfold repay all time and effort spent upon it.

Constantly, therefore, because he was so ardent, he told himself to go slowly, cautiously, and above all not to lose his head until she should prove willing.

To his practiced eye the same method of approach as with Esther was out of the question. Liberality—yes, that must always be manifest to attract any woman. But to this missionary's daughter one must show mental traits, subtlety, understanding, ability to think for oneself. But surely the magician had these also in his bag!

Mr. Ko sat in his dressing room where his Number One boy had just finished shaving him, and still hovered about to see what service he could render.

"You know some boys, Palace Hotel, pretty well?" asked the master.

"Yes, Master; very well know some boy there."

"Huh! You saw tall Englishman here last night?"

"Mista Household, eh?"

"That's the man. You find out how well he knows America lady with him. You say nothing. Understand?"

"Yes, Master. I know."

"If he is headstrong to believe still in that senseless little Japan plot, if he thinks even now I am working to thwart that petty scheme, he can be made to believe still more. I had thought him very much in my way. On the contrary he is going to be quite useful, once I understand his actual relation to the girl."

Number One boy looked at his master, utterly bewildered. Though spoken in his native tongue it was too complicated, too vague for his mind to follow, so he meekly answered once more: "Yes, Master."

The two were coming at one o'clock for tiffin. Already Mr. Ko had ordered his car to pick them up at the hotel.

The lovely little Mrs. Landon had too sharp a tongue. Why in the name of one's ancestors couldn't so pretty a woman be always nice! She had been quite petulant when they got home last night, apparently because her old lover, the Englishman, was consoling himself with Miss Farley.

That, after all, is the difficulty with the *partie carrée;* it isn't like a dance, nor yet like two sedate European married couples. One couldn't pair them; one couldn't even define the relations of any other two—why, he might even lose the dark-eyed Esther while he pursued this new woman.

He could hear again the slow intonation of her soft voice, so lazily alluring, voluptuous as a hammock in the shade of a tree, and as restful.

He smiled at himself in the long mirror. Courage! He had won many a hard battle in the lists of matrimony and its near relations.

"They call chess a difficult game," he told his image, "but that is one move at a time. Have they never heard the adage: 'The game of love is but half for the player, the other half is chance'? Today I study to keep fast my little English girl. The trout must not slip through the fingers while we angle for the goldfish."

"Eh? Come in!" he cried in answer to a timid knock at his door.

The knock was repeated, and this time he answered it in English. The door opened slowly, and like a frightened child Esther came slowly in—and closed the door behind her.

Number One boy silently withdrew, so gently impersonal that one would believe he saw nothing in the whole wide world to cause a wonder or a doubt.

No longer the petulant little lady, Esther came and stood beside the carved chair in which Mr. Ko was seated. She had been crying; her eyes were sad and tearful. He was a little afraid of coming storm as he sat there waiting for her to begin. No silly child, this, to be scolded or cajoled by her superiors. He had heard the sharp flashes of her speech and had a healthy respect for her ability to wield her own weapons. A cunning man, Mr. Ko, who knew when silence was the best currency.

"I've been a silly ass long enough," she said; "now I'm going back to poor Peter."

"No," he answered, drawing her down upon his knee, and smoothing her sleek black hair as one makes friends with a cat.

"No; this is why you are not going—because he is—poor Peter."

"But you are tired of me—already. You prefer that missionary woman with her slow drawl and her lazy ways. Even her voice is so lazy you fall asleep before she says it."

He took both her little hands in one of his. She thought how black his eyes were, and that he would be better looking without that little mustache. His free arm crushed her body against his own. There was no trace of indifference in the kiss he pressed against her lips. Suddenly he whispered: "In my land we say: 'So many stars—to each its place. One stands not to hide the others.' Why cannot two lovely women likewise?"

"Your country's saying," she answered, when he would stop to listen, "is rubbish. Only those stars that get in front of all the rest are ever seen by us. Yes, you are right. Women are likewise. You would hardly believe that this sober goose, Jerry Householder, used to be called a wild man. Why, I was afraid to marry him! And now he's about as wild as the sexton of a church. One would think he had never cared for me—can't see anyone but that missionary. Is it at all likely that the little Japanese plot he unearthed is of any real consequence?"

"You jump like the squirrel from branch to branch," he fended. Her mention of the long since exploded plot suggested a possibility. Why not use that, coupled with the seriousness which had come to the Englishman, as a result of the war! He could see great possibilities in this if properly handled.

"They are coming for tiffin," he concluded aloud. "My little sweetheart shall help to entertain them. One day her grateful friend and ad-mir-er shall give her nice little run-about motor for appreciation of—her—understanding."

She knew he was buying her again. All sorts of cutting replies flashed into her quick mind, only to be repressed by what she chose to call common sense. You couldn't expect to make friends with the mammon of unrighteousness without some sort of sacrifice. This man meant not comfort merely, but luxury. He had but to snap his fingers and Heaven opened its pearly gates upon its streets of gold.

"And Peter?" he added, for he had seen what were her thoughts.

"Peter!" she repeated contemptuously. "Peter? I'd forgotten there was such a person."

CHAPTER XIII

When Peter fled down Nanking Road, for it was a flight, he had no definite idea, except to get away from an intolerable situation. He must get by himself to think it over. Perhaps then it wouldn't prove to be so bad as it looked.

He walked on as far as the race track where two young Englishmen were trying out a couple of new ponies. He turned in at the gate, glad that he was a member of the Race Club and had a right to be there. In the shadow of the stables he sat down, vaguely aware of the green grass, of trees, of the thud of racing feet.

Esther was the bowstring kept taut until it must break or be relaxed. Monotony, that was the real trouble; sick and tired of the life, but not of him. Here he smiled, that little wry smile that was rather a fight to keep back the tears. It was only jealously, unreasonable jealousy, that made him think there was anything—well, anything intimate, out of the way, between his wife and Ko-Yiang.

To be at all, anything like that must have been deliberate on her part. It wasn't fair to that brightest and prettiest of all women to harbor such an unjust suspicion for a moment!

Just like her, though, not to care tuppence what any-

one thought. If they were base enough, let 'em think what they would and go hang! He could hear her saying it.

"And I'll back you up, old girl," he concluded, when he had gone all over it a dozen times.

"You're quite all right, and not the sort to throw your life away in a hut on the banks of the Yangtse."

This time the tears really were in his eyes, but they weren't tears of pity for himself; they were tears of appreciation for the brilliant girl who had given him her heart and hand before she knew how much of sacrifice the giving entailed. He got up and walked back to the water front still pondering Esther and his duty to her. If she also had a duty toward him such a thought was absent from his consideration.

The tall man, Householder, came in for his share. How could it have been that Esther ever threw that man over to marry him? He little understood that Esther had many times asked herself the same question.

Five hours later a spare little man stood at the rail of a river steamer going west. All the other passengers were below at dinner. The soft breeze blew the thin locks of his sandy hair back from his forehead. A native patiently fishing on the bank saw the little man on the deck and called out to his grandson: "See yonder, another old man travels up the river."

Once more Peter Landon was unsettling the question which he had settled at the Race Club. If it were so, if the worst were true, what then? Would it be his duty

to denounce her before the world? Some men went in for shooting and all that sort of thing if the case were proven. But what good was ever done by that sort of violence! If it all came against her will—but that's a very different thing.

Other men might settle it to suit themselves, but he, Peter Landon, knew that it wasn't in him to feel rage toward his wife or toward the man. The very suspicion that it might be so made him faint, and coupled with the sickness was horrible disappointment with himself. He had won her, probably by her own error of judgment, and having won he couldn't hold her against the first competitor—or was it ennui?

Things were not going well at the mine. He had meant to tell her, to explain why he had so long postponed the promised visit to Shanghai; but he had been fearful of one of her outbursts of temper. He fairly cringed to hear himself called a coward, a failure, something less than half a man.

If he had recovered the lost fortune there, if he could lavish money on her—as Mr. Ko had done since he first met her——

Once, long ago, yet not so long, they had come up the river together on this very boat. Passing this very spot, her hand in his, she had talked of their future; she had hoped there would be children. And before they went below she had leant against him and whispered: "Do you love me, Peter? How much?"

Yes, she had cared then, for just a little while.

"Massa, no b'long dinnertime down below?" asked the sedate and gentle steward at his elbow. Peter smiled and shook his head.

"Sickee? My bling——"

Once more he shook his head and uttered a final No!

What strange creatures, these white men! thought the kindly steward as he glided noiselessly away. So much good food below, yet this man would rather look at the river water than eat his fill!

Darkness came, and still the little man leaned against the rail peering out at nothing; but the emptiness out there was cheerful compared to the emptiness within. Morning would come, and with it, light. Homes, such as they were, the day would bring along that river bank; men and their wives, children, happiness and love were out there in the dark.

Somewhere, somehow, he had failed her. Tears, blinding his eyes, fell unheeded into the great river which would bear them down to Shanghai, where she might see them on the morrow. And if she should see them, should know that they were his? She would laugh, might even point them out to her wealthy friend.

He shivered; the air was cold. It was very late. The little man crept down the companionway, through the dim corridor to his cabin where he lay down fully dressed upon his bunk and stared up at two shadows which swayed in an endless game of tag on the low ceiling.

Perhaps, if he could sell his claim and holdings in the mine for a few hundred pounds, he might take a clerk-

ship in the bank at Shanghai, and then Esther—but what could Esther do on his tiny salary? Besides—no one would buy his holdings. Fast in a trap—that described his position—a trap——

A bell was ringing—but what had a bell to do with traps? Footsteps clattering overhead. A voice calling out: "Stand ready there—make her fast!"

Peter sprang to his feet. He was stiff with a cramp in his leg. They were up at the dock in Nanking. Already a line of coolies was coming aboard. Jinricksha men were quarreling for passengers coming ashore. Peter picked up his father's old portmanteau and went ashore with the rest.

Before noon, in his own little launch he passed the yellow cottage without so much as a glance of recognition. Already he was late, the mine superintendent could not be trusted to run even their small business without him.

Then followed the usual futile day of worry and effort with no tangible result. Evening brought him back to what he once called home, an empty, cheerless place. A brown rat on the kitchen table was finishing the last crumbs of a meat pie made with infinite pains by Peter himself the day before he left for Shanghai. He would have sworn he locked it up in the buttery.

The day he made that pie a little blue bird was singing to him that he might possibly bring Esther back with him. Just as he put it in the oven that hope had grown so strong that he marked the pie with a big "V."

"That's for Vashti," he said aloud. "How she will laugh!"

And now the rats had eaten it—and all because when his portmanteau was packed his heart failed him. He knew very well she wouldn't give up the god Mammon for Peter Landon and his meat pie. So he had forgotten even to lock it up.

Ugh! The place was cold! Dust, dust over everything. Soot from the oil stove still hung in the air. He could smell soot and dust and the reek of worse things in that neglected house.

The two little beds in the bedroom were ghastly spectres; only a mattress on hers, his own still worse with its bedclothes a jumbled heap at the foot where he had thrown them. In the little mirror over her dressing table, where he had so many times watched her as she brushed those glossy thick strands of black hair, he saw a white anxious face. Fight? For what object? Hadn't he already fought—and lost?

Hunger drove him back to the kitchen. The brown rat was gone. He lighted the oil stove, made a pot of strong tea, found bread in a tin box, and toasted three slices. A tumbler of marmalade half full was on the shelf; he ate all that was left of it.

With tea and toast and marmalade came sanity and courage. His pipe and tobacco lay on the mantel in the living room. Was it the stimulant, the nourishment, or the depressant that gave him new hope, that dusted the neglected rooms after a fashion, let in enough fresh air

to blow out the soot and the smells, that finally sent him to bed almost persuaded, after that last pipeful, that she might come back?

Whichever it was, he knew when the tide turned; knew that on the incoming wave happiness was no longer a mockery. He had been happy—he was morally certain to be happy again.

Wasn't Esther his wife, and the brightest, wittiest and prettiest girl he ever knew?

Peter made his bed properly, and went to sleep with a smile on his lips, for he was thinking of her. He was even imagining that she was there in that bed next his own, and she was chaffing him for being jealous. It made him rather ashamed. But it was heavenly to hear that musical laugh, heavenly to think that she cared.

A cold wind came down the river; it rattled a blind on the bedroom window. The yellow coffin outside trembled in the darkness. The brown rat unsatisfied had come back to the kitchen. But Peter smiled and slept.

CHAPTER XIV

"THE English have a saying about a Divinity that shapes our ends—is this not so?"

Mr. Ko was still awaiting the arrival of his two guests for tiffin. Esther Landon who was with him answered: "Poetry, my dear; and poetry, like antique furniture, never stands squarely on its legs."

"I didn't know this—that poetry had legs."

"You must have scanned them, stupid; at least its feet."

But Mr. Ko was not listening. He was thinking how strange it was that he had taken all this trouble to get the Englishman here, because he was jealous of him as Esther's former lover. And now—he was jealous for fear that he might outrun him in the race to get the American girl.

He smiled grimly as he thought how lucky that he had kept him deceived about that silly plot over which he had wasted so much zeal. It was to torture himself with the sight of them together, to study how deep the impression which he had to efface, that he had invited them today. Something indefinable, indescribable, about that American girl appealed to Mr. Ko, caught him in its meshes, enthralled him, as he felt that he had never before been caught.

Now it must be admitted that Mr. Ko had had numberless experiences, could qualify as an expert, and was exceeding wise in the ways of the world—to say nothing of the flesh and the devil.

Mr. Ko stretched his long legs out to the coal fire in his grate and pondered what use to make of Jerry Householder in possessing himself of the American girl. First he must see how much they cared for each other. Then he must discover what road led to the girl's heart. Experience had shown him that with the great majority that road, like the streets of the Christian Heaven, was paved with gold.

Ah, but some must be carried *vi et armis* as in the Rape of the Sabines.

Sometimes the stoniest hearts were softened by the unction of Flattery.

Well, he had all these arrows in his quiver. Number Two Boy came up to say that guests had arrived. He was in time to prevent Esther Landon from a difficult decision. With a woman's perception she had seen the advent of Mr. Ko's new passion, had been trying to devise some way to circumvent or counteract it. Thus far without success.

Had he been Anglo-Saxon as he lolled there before the fire in receptive mood, she would have contrived some petting method, such as rumpling his hair and stroking his head with deft fingers that sometimes strayed over his face. Most men and dogs can be won by this simple, manual attention.

But not the god Mammon. That jet hair, shining from the ministrations of an expert—no sane woman would dare profane that shrine or trample upon the sacred traditions which decreed that in all such affairs woman must be utterly passive, subject without question to the will of her lord and master.

Barred from taking the initiative, she was forced to invent some situation to show the man his need of her, or to contrast her virtues and charms with the other woman's shallowness and superficiality.

Possibly she might avoid this difficult task if she could re-waken his jealousy of Jerry, good old Jerry who was so different since the war.

Her first opportunity came when they were seated at table, and she could ask "that Farley missionary woman," as she had persistently spoken of her, "Did you know that an action is likely to be brought against you for appropriating an escort on whom I have a prior claim?"

Jerry looked embarrassed and began to protest. "Oh, I say now——"

But Constance's soft, un-American voice answered, leisurely as usual, "I plead guilty, Mrs. Landon, and the worst of it was that when I appropriated him I never suspected that he was your husband. And, by the way, what has become of him? Why isn't he with us?"

"I didn't mean," Esther began, then thinking it better to let the cat score, "that is—my husband is too busy, running a worthless mine."

"How interesting! And how does one—run a mine? I thought of them as exploding."

"They run them into the ground—once they start," Esther retorted.

"Oh, I see—the old confusion again between mine and thine."

Now, curiously, it was in Constance's readiness to cross swords with the other woman, in her calm, unruffled manner of holding her own, that Mr. Ko found the evidence of what he had before suspected. For Jerry Householder was plainly proud of Constance Farley as he was annoyed by Esther's attempt to bait her and put her in an awkward position regarding him.

And he had brought this man to Shanghai for so different a purpose! However, no cause for regret, for without him Miss Farley would not have come to China.

Whether Householder understood it or not, his host from that very moment knew that the Englishman was much taken with the American woman. It had long been plain to him regarding that old love for Esther Landon, that it was of the dead past. He would have felt keener about her, in fact, had there been some such competition.

These Englishmen were hard to handle because they didn't understand diplomacy. Everything must be bang out in the open.

"I hear pretty bad stories about your Japanese plotters," he said, watching Jerry's face for the effect.

"Bad—in what way?" Jerry asked, interested at once.

"Are the rotters getting ahead? Have they done anything in China?"

"I fear so. It is all ver-y quiet doings—so no one hears about it. Headquarters now in Seoul. Easy to work from there. Should you be willing if we could use you a little more in this?"

"Anything in my power, I'm ready to do," Jerry promised with almost his old wartime fervor.

What astonishing men, these British! thought Mr. Ko. One has but to raise the cry for help and they come running like dogs to the whistle! They haven't yet learned the old world maxim: "To live one must care first for himself." Christianity has made them easy to handle, like hunting dogs.

Tiffin was being served with the perfection of Chinese system—all so noiseless and gently handled that the dishes seemed to appear by magic, the glasses to refill themselves with the choicest wine.

Mr. Ko, watching his guests, noted that the American ate and drank and smoked her cigarette with the same indolent grace which had charmed and surprised him in her speech.

"We have with us today, as your banquet masters of the toast say, two ver-ee singular example of unusual in the English and the American."

Thus the host began a deliberate attempt to pit the two women against each other that he might study them.

"They are unusual," Jerry agreed, "but I wonder, do you see what I see in this respect?"

"What I see," Ko-Yiang explained, "is English girl lively, vivacious as French, French in looks also, in the quick wit and ready re-tort. And American, not to speak so with the nose, not to make slangy language, nor quick, violent action. But everywhere, every way so calm, so—plenty of time—like the Spanish. Now you, big and blond and literal, are English type. I am Chinese type—nothing else."

"Why all this analysis?" Esther interrupted him, to which his only answer was a shrug and the extending of his long yellow hands in token of granting all in his possession to give.

But Esther, not contented, anxious to know what valuation he put upon so different characteristics, must have more.

"I know you wouldn't be so rude, but it almost seemed like classing us women as the quick and the dead."

"Or was it," drawled Constance, "the tortoise and the hare?"

"My word!" this from Jerry, "there's an idea!"

Mr. Ko pulling at the rat tail ends of his mustache said nothing. His black eyes were narrowed into slits through which he watched, delighted at the success of his manœuvre.

"Personalities aren't a pretty topic, are they?" Esther said. " 'Twould be safer to go back to my poor husband."

"Oh, really! And when do you go? I suppose you get horribly homesick having to be away so long."

If Constance meant to be hateful, nothing in her tone

or expression betrayed it. She was absolutely a person who had misunderstood.

The blandest manner, however, couldn't deceive Esther Landon. She had deliberately gone to work to make this American look cheap. Thus far she herself had got the worst of it, and it galled her to think it should have been before Jerry Householder. Once, years ago, when he was in love with her, he had criticized her: "You are a brilliant monologuist—but in a duel your best thoughts refuse to come. Keep out of arguments."

She had been deeply offended at the time, but she was too bright not to have discovered since that Jerry might have been somewhere near the truth.

Esther waited to give the other woman time to add to her remark and spoil it. Not even by a smile of triumph did Miss Farley betray any emotion. Finally Esther answered with a touch of asperity: "My plans are very uncertain. When my host begins to weary of my society——"

"Ah! my dear lady," protested Mr. Ko, "you speak of eternity."

"Very pretty, very French, and very delightful if half true." She smiled her thanks as well, and Mr. Ko was pleased, for he thought he detected a look of jealousy in the eyes of the American, or of envy at least. And what woman would not be envious of one who was a favorite of the great god Gold!

Like all his educated countrymen, Ko-Yiang in his use of the English language varied from perfect grammatical form to a vernacular little short of translation from the

Chinese. This seems due in most cases to the degree of concentration on the language itself. Often an interest in the topic will lead the speaker to a careless use of the medium he employs, when if using his own language, accurate expression is the prerequisite of straight abstract thought.

Householder was asking some question of Miss Farley that had to do with financial affairs in the United States, to which she was trying to give a satisfactory answer based on very limited knowledge.

Esther saw that it was an excellent opportunity to engage Mr. Ko so as to keep him out of obvious temptation. It seemed ridiculous that, intimate as they were, she dared not even now attempt to draw him into cosy, intimate conversation. You couldn't flirt with the Bank of England even if you had surrendered to it all right and title to whatever was yours to give. And your princely Chinese gentleman also was an institution. She smiled at her own irony as she surveyed the metaphor, for he also was a banking institution.

If the bank were in the mood to call upon her—she could only play her part by suggestion well covered up. This was in the nature of fresh deposits.

"You are the cleverest host I ever saw," she said quite low. "It is wonderful the way you put every guest at ease, and yet you must see clearly enough how some people, thinking you simple because an Oriental, try to use you."

"You say these people think me simple? This is to be

a fool. Who says this? From where did you hear it? Simple?" He was getting excited, mistaking her meaning, not understanding that she dealt with vague generalities.

Esther laid her white, slender hand on his, long and yellow. She could feel the white jade Buddha on the signet ring worn on his thumb. It was cold and hard. He turned to her, surprised by such boldness in public. His self-esteem was wounded and his face was like the Buddha on his ring.

Tiffin was over. Little cups of tea had given place to little European glasses of brandy. As they rose Constance wondered whether it were his heavy silk robes or the habit of command which gave him the dignity of the Supreme Court in session.

CHAPTER XV

An hour later Constance Farley came down the stairs wearing the plain cloth coat which was her best. She was going back to the Palace Hotel. It was only a comfortable walking distance. Jerry was waiting for her in the hall, where also their host and Mrs. Landon had come out to say an informal good-bye.

With the peculiar gliding motion of a bird about to light, and of some animals in motion, Constance crossed the hall. Suddenly it occurred to Jerry Householder that she moved with seductive grace. So sudden was the thought, so foreign to his habitual mood that he felt ashamed as if he had been prying, had no right to see it. Glancing up he met the dark glowing eyes of Ko-Yiang. He saw written in them all that he had thought, and much more.

Instantly what he had feared and dimly suspected regarding Esther Landon became established fact. The man's soul stood there naked for Jerry Householder to note its imperfections.

But Constance Farley was looking frankly into those same eyes, yet what she saw could not displease her. She was the ideally appreciative guest. Mr. Ko, holding her hand in both of his, said: "So that is a promise—for tomorrow. You will not disappoint?"

"A promise," she repeated, "and I will try not to disappoint."

When they had gone Esther remarked: "I asked you once how you, a Chinese, ever learned to kiss——"

"Yes," he answered absently, for his thoughts were on the motion of that other woman's hips. "And I told you——?"

"That it had been a part of your European education."

"The wise man," he added, giving her now his whole attention, "is he who takes from each Nation the best which it has to give. I have tried to do this."

"And whence comes the love of secrecy, intrigue, mystery?"

To this leading question his answer was sure to be denial of any such habit or taste, and thus she could introduce the missionary as a topic for discussion. Once again she learned how little she knew her man.

"This trait," he admitted blandly as he lighted a fresh cigarette, having politely offered her one which she declined with a shake of the head, "this trait the Chinese does not learn; he is born with it."

Number One Boy was waiting patiently to be noticed. His master interrogated him without speech, but by the lifting of his eyebrows. The man began chanting what sounded like a hymn in minor key, his hands held clasped behind his back like a schoolboy reciting; what he said would have been utterly unintelligible to Esther had she not caught: Pa-lace Ho-tel.

"I have made already visit to my friend of Palace

Hotel," the man was explaining. "Boys there know English not have that girl for his wife, not yet. He say English make plenty call, more and more; not night times, not yet. He say boy make plenty mistake all time—rush into room when he there. They feller talkee much; do nothing!" he ended in Pidgin English as a tribute to the puzzled guest of the house. But if Mr. Ko noticed the sudden lapse of his Number One Boy he was too crafty to betray it, and Esther dared not cross the dead line of decorum to ask him a question concerning his affairs.

Nevertheless she could wonder why this report of something which had to do with the hotel where Jerry and that woman were staying. She tried a random shot. "'Much talk and no action,' is the definition I heard a Frenchman give of American women."

"Might this not also be applied to the plays of Shakespeare?" he asked. "They too are of surpassing beauty."

He was teasing. A sudden inspiration came to her. "Seriously, if I could help you better to—to understand beautiful American women—you know that I should be glad? You know that you could trust me?"

Versatile as he had found her, this was a complete surprise. His eyes acknowledged it though his lips waited to make sure that she was not playing a part to mislead him.

"Esther," he said finally with that warmth of tone and inflection which had first fascinated her. "If you would so help me I should love you not less as you in the heart

imagine. No, no—more than ever, for you would show the perfect trust of the friend."

"That; or the folly of one who helps another woman to supplant her?"

"No, not that. Never do you get the idea that a man may love both laughter and song; blue and yellow. One does not forbid the other. Is not the average American good at conversing?"

"Their conversation is of the vacuum cleaner type. It leaves nothing to the imagination."

"Possibly you mean it leaves everything clean."

"Not exactly that," she corrected him. "It cleans up the subject so thoroughly and without discrimination, it even tears the buttons from one's clothes."

"But you will help me?" he countered.

"Yes, if you wish. I will show the extent of my friendship."

"And you will not find me ungrateful," he ended as, according to his custom, he went to write and study and be alone for a few hours before dinner.

Jerry and Constance, meantime, were walking home. Constance, before they had walked a hundred yards, was aware of a change in the man whom she had begun to regard as a brother. Never having had a brother, she imagined that sisters felt exactly as she felt: a mixture of gratitude for strength and protection, with a fair share of every woman's desire to mother a man. If the attraction of sex were there also as the complement of her own she seemed not to recognize it.

Yet instinctively she knew that he was different from his former self. There was a sudden shyness for which she could find no explanation. A queer time this to become shy when they had been throwing to the winds every convention, defying the world to say or think unspeakable things!

Had there, perhaps, been talk which had but now reached his ears? He was a contradiction all the way through, this bold but modest, wild but singularly civilized and considerate man.

"I like your friend, Mrs. Landon," she began. "She isn't as happy as she looks. Somehow I think that dear little, pathetic husband of hers is on her conscience. She'd be harder than stone if he wasn't. Isn't it a pity that so few people know what they're doing when they get married!"

"I've never been married," Jerry said, "so I suppose I'm not entitled to an opinion. I think the trouble is they don't understand give and take. If I had a wife——"

"Yes—if you had a wife?"

He didn't wish to think anything of the sort, but his mind kept saying, "she'd have to move with your seductive glide."

Not being subtle enough to think of one thing and say another he was embarrassed. He stole a glance at her walking there by his side, and vowed that he would invent some excuse to watch her from a distance coming towards him. To his surprise she walked exactly as she

talked, as she moved her hands; yes, it was even in her eyes.

And Ko-Yiang had seen it, and had looked at her with those black and yellow eyes. Possessive, that described his peculiar way of looking. Sometimes a long way off you would see a man looking at a horse. Some atmosphere or manner or gesture indescribable told you that the man knew he had but to say yes or no to decide the ownership of that horse. Exactly that possessive arrogance marked the appraisal of Mr. Ko. If he decided that he wanted her, the next and only other question must be: How much?

"Well, I haven't yet heard what she would have to do, or be."

"Right," he agreed. "You see it dawned upon my darkness just then that I had no idea what she would or wouldn't be. It's likely I'd be a silly ass like all the rest."

He, who had been singularly free from the vice of curiosity, knew at that instant that he was desirous to know what engagement the American had with Ko-Yiang that was a promise for the morrow. And just what could she have meant by that: "I promise and I will try not to disappoint"?

Was that what he had seen in Mr. Ko's eyes—anticipation of tomorrow? Was that also the meaning of the seductive charm of her every gesture, every intonation, every glance of the eyes? Was it thus she could promise not to disappoint?

A new note came now into his voice. He hadn't thus far admitted to himself any feeling of jealousy. What were these people to him? He had abandoned his position in Shizuoka not for this singularly heterogeneous group with whom he was living. To be sure, since his mother's death he had been financially independent, but he had come away from Japan solely because of a plot which threatened his own country.

This woman beside him—a chance acquaintance—he might walk off tomorrow and never see her again. But, even as he thought the words, he knew that suddenly it had become impossible for him to leave her.

He told himself that chivalry might demand that he see her through. The next moment that notion was scornfully rejected. Chivalry? Did that girl need any champion, any protector, but her own cool and clever self?

In his abstraction he failed to notice that she had ventured no reply. He went on, therefore, in answer to his own thoughts, but in what seemed to her an abrupt turn: "A man judges women by his mother—if he never had sisters. My mother was the old-fashioned, black alpaca type."

"I didn't know there was—of course I've heard of men of the cloth. Is alpaca the feminine?"

"More or less, yes—and cloth-topped Congress boots with patent leather toe caps went with the black alpaca, and a cap with flowing lace strings and a Thou Shalt Not creed; a grave suspicion of all that is really hu-

man, and a conviction that: If you like it, it's wrong!"

"And would your apparent disappointment in that type——"

"Call it repugnance," he interrupted.

"Well, would repugnance to that type lead you to seek the opposite extreme, one of the sort that has complexes but no morals—whose life is wholly physical as the other was metaphysical?"

"What would you yourself say to that?" he asked bluntly. "I've always felt like adding a line to 'All's right with the World.' God's in his Heaven; Satan's in his Hell; Everything in its proper place.

"By Jove, that's a bit cryptic for me," he acknowledged.

The deeper in it sank, the more puzzling he found it. It by no means cleared up his uncertainty as to that promise to Ko-Yiang. One could interpret this either way.

He kept repeating to himself that what this young woman thought or did was no concern of his. And the oftener he said it the less could he make himself believe it. Finally he spoke aloud: "You see if I'd had a black alpaca sister——"

"A sister," she broke in, "would have worn a hoop skirt, to be really consistent, and pantalettes with a sweet smile to match."

"I get the picture," he assented, "hoop skirt, pantalettes, pig-tail braids—all but the smile to match."

"To match the pantalettes. You see it in old daguer-

reotypes; looks as if it had come undone and was slipping off."

"And have sisters improved so much since the Victorian type?" he asked in his literal way.

"Whether it's an improvement or not," she said, "it's a big jump from the insecure pantalette to the permanent wave."

"Do you know," she broke off, "we are talking as though we weren't half so—so well acquainted as we were yesterday."

"Strange," he admitted, knowing in his heart that after this discovery of his it couldn't be otherwise—"but which way do you like better?"

"Better?" she repeated.

"Excuse, please!" and from nowhere, with the noiseless stealth of his race, appeared before them Ko-Yiang's Number One Boy. He was bareheaded, and he bowed low in token of his estimate of his master's esteem.

He held out a note neatly sealed and addressed to her. Constance thanked him, much to his surprise, whereupon with the words, "No ansee," he was gone, quietly, swiftly as he had come.

She folded the envelope, and held it in her hand.

"Don't you care to read it?" Jerry asked. "I'll excuse you."

"It will keep," she said, "on the ice," and tucked it into the bosom of her dress.

They had reached their hotel. She lingered at the office but a moment, then went up in the lift.

Jerry was left alone. He got out his pipe, stuffed it from his pouch, and when it was lighted and drawing well he took it from his lips to address it.

"My God!" he exclaimed, "what could she mean by that?"

CHAPTER XVI

PROMPTLY at three, as she had agreed the day before, Constance Farley came down to the office of the Palace Hotel, looked about for a moment to see if he or one of his were there; then going to the front door she stepped out into Nanking Road.

A row of rickshaw boys before the door were scurrying to get their little carriages out of the way of an arrogant motor car of English make.

On the front seat beside the driver sat a blue and yellow uniform containing a man whose face was a yellow mask. As the car stopped, the uniform stepped out to open the door, but no one else so much as stirred. The uniform faced the door of the hotel. Catching sight of Constance Farley the right hand touched the forehead of the man inside the uniform.

She crossed the narrow sidewalk. Esther Landon was in the car with Mr. Ko. Apparently either pleased or amused by this discovery Constance was smiling as she stepped in. The uniform closed the door, resumed its place in front. The car glided out on to the Bund, turned to the right, and after passing the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank took another turn to the right.

"Why a ride in the French quarter?" Jerry, who had seen all this from the street corner, asked himself. He

was glad that chance had delayed him at the Bank where he had gone to cash his first draft from Japan to repay Mr. Ko for money generously lent him—glad because he might just as well know how things stood between those two—he, who had already fallen headlong in love had no notion of being precipitate or allowing himself to become interested in any one who cared nothing for him. Not he!

So he took a seat in the hotel office where he could read his book with an eye on the door where she must appear when that mysterious promise was fulfilled. Instead of reading he was asking himself questions, impossible questions, for how could he know whether this expedition were a ride, a shopping tour—By Jove, it was a consolation to know that Esther was there. Good old Esther, no one had ever fooled her more than once—with that quick tongue of hers. Glad you turned me down, old dear. It would have been a rum go—with all her fondness for show and universal attention.

The big car had to pick its way very slowly where so many walked in the narrow streets. At every corner its horn blared a warning, and the poor scurried into doorways to make way for Wealth and Luxury. But even the poor in their blue cotton, flitting by the red painted fronts of shops, the gay dragons in gold and green, under the lanterns dangling in festoons across the street, were picturesque and attractive if one didn't come too near.

To left, to right, to left again they turned. Everywhere the same chattering crowds that seemed to be the

very beings they had left in the street behind them, and in the street behind that. Crowds and color; crowds and the smell of China and Chinese; crowds and Mystery; crowds with a History that made the oldest in Europe a thing of yesterday.

At a little shop next the vendor of live geese, an old man with a long white beard, a thin beard that was all one with his thin white mustache, offered wares of carved ivory and embroidered silks.

On the corner a little man, half-covered rather than clad, wheezed to all passers-by the virtues of his ear cleaners, tiny wads of cotton wool on tiny bamboo sticks, hanging in a wreath from a bamboo frame like a broken bird cage.

No one bought, but the little man's zeal never flagged. Some one might buy. His profit on a sale was fitly portrayed by Esther who exclaimed as the car came to a stop:

"That old fellow's sales in a day must mount up to about seven cents Mexican, but what keeps his courage up is thinking of the enormous percentage of profit over cost."

"It is all extremely interesting," Constance exclaimed. "And quite different from Korea or Japan."

At a little wicket in a heavy door two very black eyes over high yellow cheek bones calmly surveyed the three as they got out of the car.

"Where are we? What is here?" Constance heard Esther ask their host, who heeded the question no more than the importunities of the seller of ear cleaners. As

for Constance, it was a pleasant adventure, this going into the heart of the native city with a native of the natives. The heavy door swung open. The three stepped into a narrow passage that seemed dark coming directly from the daylight outside.

A long way off a faint red light glowed from a hanging lamp.

The air was heavy with a smell that made Constance think of "burnt offerings." Under their feet the carpet was so thick one felt unsteady on it. The walls were hung with some fabric which gave to the touch, but gave slowly because of its weight.

Somewhere a voice chanted, talking in Chinese. The sentinel from the door uttered three words in three keys and Mr. Ko answered him in one. The man led on through the corridor. The others followed, like ghosts, for they made no sound as they went.

At the end of the corridor they came into the room where the red lamp swung from the ceiling. Half a dozen other lamps gave each the candle light of a little wick floating in oil, so that at first the room seemed dim.

Soon Constance made out bunks on two walls, one above another, like the berths in a ship. The room was not large, scarcely more than six yards in length. If it had windows they were concealed by the heavy red hangings. In this room also the floor was thickly carpeted. Every sound was muffled.

Following the example of the others Constance sat upon, or rather sank into a wide divan where she reclined between her host and Esther, who had moved aside to make room for her. Soft cushions supported their shoulders.

Constance leaned on her elbow to answer the question of Mr. Ko. The position impressed her as intimate when he turned bringing his face close to hers.

"I wished for you to see first the fabrics of this place, very exquisite ancient embroideries. Also I have wished that you see the peculiar graceful dancer here, *geisha,* yes, but not *geisha* dance. It is different. But to you who move, speak, use the hands, the eyes, all but the brain so fascinatingly slow—this, I think, will to you also appeal."

Was it the vividness of his imagination, she wondered, which caused him thus to forget the usual correctness of his speech? She had to turn her back upon Mrs. Landon, leaning upon her right elbow to talk to him; but such was the subtle influence of this muffled place, that usually exacting lady had but one thought: that Miss Farley should enjoy her afternoon.

It was that air of proprietorship which forms a part of the superiority of those fellow travellers who have been over the ground before.

When, after due feminine raptures over silks, brocades and embroidered grass cloth, Constance was half buried in these treasures, it was Esther who explained:

"And you know, my dear, he means that you shall keep all these things to remember the day."

What spell had come over Esther Landon that she should seem pleased to have it so?

And he, carelessly handling a gorgeous scarf which he had thrown about her shoulders, insisted, "It is but a slight souvenir of a great occasion."

What could she do? Surely nothing to wound his feelings. In the next room, separated only by a curtain, music like that which she knew so well at Seoul throbbed and sang the weird lamentation of the Eastern dance. Hidden behind the curtains she knew that an old man held firmly immovable in one hand a heavy bow, while with the other he revolved against it an instrument half fiddle, half banjo, with three strings and a neck four feet long. Another beat with his knuckles the drum, and a third blew unearthly but unerring notes upon a reed, notes that wailed for the spirits departed, notes that called to the girl of the East to pose and writhe in the symbols of the dance.

Why was it that the music and the poetry of the East was left wholly to the performance of the aged?

As she pondered this question, gratefully conscious also of joy to come in the possession of such princely gifts, a girl parted the curtains, gliding before the low divan. Accustomed now to the light, Constance could see that the dancer was young and beautiful, also that she wore so diaphanous a covering as to accentuate her lack of clothes.

A boy came bringing on a tray a pitcher and silver goblets. He was in the way. Constance wished he would move that she might see the dancer.

"Drink this," Esther urged. "You will love it."

The boy filled the goblets with a clear amber fluid. Mr. Ko touched his to each of theirs, and nodding each to each they drank.

The air was warm, heavy with incense, motionless save for the rhythmic swaying of the dancer.

"I was so thirsty," Constance explained as she drained the cool, deliciously sweet liquid, and gave back into Mr. Ko's hand the curiously wrought silver goblet. That his and Esther's remained scarcely tasted had escaped her in the novelty of her surroundings.

The dancer was blurred, curiously enough, had no clear outline, was merely a swirl of cigarette smoke and staring dark eyes.

Constance wished that she would stop, that that awful music would cease even for a minute.

Mr. Ko lighted a cigarette for her. She thanked him, a little too effusively she suspected, adding, "You know, I didn't like you at first. You mustn't be offended but—I didn't trust you. You remember that line about not trusting the Danai when they come bearing gifts? I suppose it was that. We Americans when we see a quid insensibly ask, pro quo?"

"But," Mr. Ko added, possessing himself of her hand, "now that you better understand the Chinese habit of mind you know that here one makes the gifts to his

friends only as the Frenchman scatters compliments. It means good will, if you understand, desire to please, yes, and the putting its expression in a form which lasts longer than the mere sound of the voice. Is it not so?"

"I hadn't thought of it that way," Constance admitted "but it is absolutely true."

Now how singular, she thought, that such a lovely idea should be new to her. And how kind and thoughtful and sympathetic her host was!

How ridiculous she had been to allow the color of his skin to prejudice her. If she could only explain this to him in a delicate way, not to hurt his feelings. He was the most generous person living. The beauty of his giving was in the way he did it. You had to accept because he made it seem that you were the one who conferred the favor—by accepting the gift. It was strange, but then—this was China! There you are—things are different in China!

She knew that he was still holding her hand, that she was no longer supporting herself on one elbow but was floating on a gigantic wave of pillows. All about her were fabrics smooth to the touch. A heavy smell was in the air. It was everywhere. She tasted it. The dim lights floating in it gasped for breath. She closed her eyes and heard Esther say, "There, she's asleep."

"But what good is this to me?" Mr. Ko asked. "I do not wish her unconscious. It was that she should let me open her eyes to the beauty of things Oriental that she has given me her promise. And see, I have not opened

her eyes. I have closed them! Pah! I have what you call slammed the door in my own face!"

All this Constance heard distinctly, yet without any clear understanding that they spoke of her.

Someone smoothed the hair back from her forehead.

When a heavy ring on the thumb of the ministering hand touched her she knew that it was Ko-Yiang.

"What if you should return in the car, leaving us here until she recovers?" he asked blandly, as if it were nothing out of the usual.

"See here, Ko Ko dear," the woman replied warmly, "there are limits. That would never do—not for a minute. It might be quite all right. I'm not saying it wouldn't. But it would not look right. And that's far more important."

"Then, what do you suggest? Plainly she must not enter the hotel thus, nor would it be wise to take her home with us."

"No, but why not leave her here, and come back for her in the morning, early? Can you trust these people?"

"Absolutely. They are trustworthy. But, Esther dear, would it not be—compatible that you should leave me here also—to look out for her?"

The last words that Constance heard were: "Not compatible, but contemptible."

She kept repeating them to herself, over and over again. They had no special meaning.

The place had grown very quiet, oppressively quiet. She opened her eyes—and it was dark.

The heavy smell still hung in the air. It was very warm. She was alone. The sound of subdued voices from a great distance reassured her. To be alone, yet to know that someone was within calling distance. Her right hand—was he still holding it? No, it was free. No one was within reach of it.

She had no idea how long afterwards it was when she opened her eyes to see that it was day. The heavy curtains had been drawn aside, revealing a window through which the daylight entered.

A man with the quiet deference of the Chinese servant propped her up with pillows, poured a cup of steaming hot tea from a quaint China pot and put it to her lips. It tasted good; it cleared her brain. She took the pretty cup in both her hands and emptied it.

"Missy little more?" asked the man.

She nodded a grateful assent and as he filled the cup again Mr. Ko and Esther entered the room.

The conversation which she had heard between these two the evening before was entirely forgotten, also the lapse of time. She had closed her eyes, might have dozed for a minute or two—but how could you account for the fact that Esther was wearing a different hat?

"Tell me," Constance asked, "have I been ill? Did I faint?"

It was Mr. Ko who answered, and he seemed deeply moved. "You were not used to our incense, our dim lights, our sweet wine and music. Together they have

combined to produce the effect exactly opposite to what I wished."

Plainly Mr. Ko, the generous giver of gifts, was disturbed.

"Let's be going," Esther said rising from her place beside her on the divan, just where she had sat when it all happened. "This place gives me the creeps."

Constance was a little unsteady on her feet.

Mr. Ko put his arm about her, and she was glad of the support. So, through the noiseless corridor again, by the heavy, swaying draperies, out through the heavy door with its little wicket—and there stood the car just where they had left it.

"It must be evening," Constance said, shivering, for the air felt chilly. She snuggled into a corner, wondering where were the crowds, for the streets were almost deserted.

In an open corner restaurant a group of laborers were eating rice from bowls, shovelling it into their mouths with their chop sticks, puffing out their cheeks with it, almost choking.

The seller of ear cleaners had forsaken his corner. Only a few shops were open.

It all seemed very strange. Esther and Mr. Ko were quiet as she had never seen them. Perhaps she had made a scene and disgraced them. But why should the two sit there speechless? Constance hoped she hadn't spoiled their little party, when Mr. Ko had been so kind. It was too great an effort to say so.

At the Palace Hotel two boys were washing the office floor. Not a foreigner was to be seen. The night watchman took her up in the lift. She wondered whether she had said "Good-by" and thanked them when she got out. One of the boys who had been washing the floor went up with her, his arms piled with silks, embroideries, the things she had been admiring when it happened—whatever it was—fainting? She had never fainted before in all her life.

"No dinner for me," she said to the white creature in her looking glass, dissipated looking, with black rings under her eyes.

Ten minutes later she was sound asleep. No one was there to see the puzzled look across her brow as she lay, but the look was there.

CHAPTER XVII

It was daylight when Constance woke, but the room seemed less bright than usual. Through the open blinds she could see a roof in the legation quarter; that roof didn't look as it had every other morning.

Her watch had stopped. She reached out to press the button for her tea. A great heap of strange and costly fabrics lay on a chair. Her own clothes were strewn anywhere, everywhere about the floor.

Disorder! How she hated disorder!

"One would think I'd been drunk," she whispered as the boy appeared at her door.

"You ring, Missy?" he asked.

"My tea," she said, unable to conceal her irritation. Why should he forget that she had tea and rolls every morning? Presently he came bringing them and explained: "Thought Missy have tea four clock."

"Well, so I do," she answered, "but I don't see what that has to do with it."

The boy, not understanding such complicated language, smiled to indicate that he would let it go at that, and withdrew leaving the tray on the chair by the bed.

After the first cup her brain began to clear. She remembered the visit of yesterday, these lovely fabrics all

gifts from kind Mr. Ko. How weak of her to have fainted!

It was later, when she had had her bath, and was dressing that two strange features of that adventure rose up in her mind demanding explanation.

She was absolutely sure that when she recovered and found Esther sitting beside her, Esther had on a different hat from the one she wore in the car. Furthermore her stockings also had changed color. She was sure of it.

She had an unpleasant association of holding hands with the remembrance of Mr. Ko,—the long drooping mustaches—and holding hands. Perhaps, probably, those long kisses were a dream. Chinese do not kiss. Of course, it was a dream. Somehow it was a dream that made her shudder.

"I wish I had thought to get the time from that stupid boy," she said, as, having finished dressing, she threw open her windows. The light outside looked strangely dim, yet the sky was not cloudy.

She would go down to the bureau, set her watch, and make her plans for the day.

The first man she met was Jerry.

"Have you been ill?" he asked, then added a little stiffly, "I waited up till half after one. Not that it's any of my business——"

"Why, we didn't go from here till long after that. It must have been early evening when we came back. I felt ill, and went at once to bed."

"Evening?" he repeated. "At midnight I rang up Ko-

Yiang's house in Bubbling Well Road, and got: 'Mister Ko, he busy now.' "

"What time of day is it now?" Constance asked. He took out his watch to be accurate in his reply: "It lacks twenty minutes to four."

"I'm utterly dazed," she confessed miserably. "I thought it was morning. I have just had my breakfast."

"Would it seem unjustifiable curiosity if I should ask what happened?"

"I don't know," she admitted weakly. "I must think it over."

How could he know the rush of thoughts, of things half remembered—were they facts or dreams?—that his disclosure had brought in an avalanche upon her!

"Wait until I can collect my thoughts," she said, looking from him to gaze at the stone floor, where they might have been mislaid. "I cannot tell what is reality, what is dream."

She raised her eyes to meet his—he had turned his back and was walking toward the door. And just when he might have helped—if she could only determine what had happened, and what was only a dream!

Esther Landon could help her—Esther, who was so self-sacrificing yesterday!

Esther would have to explain her change of hat—as well as heart.

"I will put on my things and simply appear," she decided. Her arrival coincided with the close of a very frank conversation about yesterday's escapade, a conver-

sation in which Esther had the better of every round, and from which Mr. Ko-Yiang beat a headlong retreat rather than attempt to face in Esther's presence the visitor whom the boy announced.

"It's the most contemptible thing I ever did in my life," Esther told him.

"Why be tragic?" he asked, trying to calm her. "People make—European people—too much fuss over these little matters which are unimportant. Be reasonable, my dear. The girl is all right. You have been good to help me. Do I love you less? I tell you I love you more than ever."

"You have no business to love me—I mean, to tell me of it. I have a husband."

Mr. Ko laughed. "Now I know your good nature is coming back—when you say funny things—like that."

"Please don't!" she insisted. "There's something—you wouldn't understand—something so sordid about it when you call it by name and admit that it's there. You could never understand it, but there's all the difference in the wide world between getting down to nature and talking about it."

"But our American friend. Surely now, she——"

"I will not hear a word about her," she cried passionately. "And what is more—I will never again lend myself to any such scheme as that."

He was looking intently into her rebellious eyes. His strong fingers possessed themselves of both her hands

as they lay in her lap. He raised them to his face and held them against his lips.

"Esther," he said solemnly. "You are good friend to me. I am good friend to you. A Sunbeam car I have ordered for you. In the shop of Honan Fee, the silversmiths, I have chosen for you a necklace of pearls. You shall go with me to see if it is right in length."

His dark eyes held hers. They glowed as she had seen them glow before. Not yet was her hold upon him gone. He desired her. His eyes pleaded for her. Her faith in herself and her star came back. If what she had done seemed contemptible, at least it was not vain.

"I wish to explain about the American——"

Mr. Ko had got to this point when she was announced and Mr. Ko was not in the mood to meet her.

As Constance entered the beautiful library of Mr. Ko-Yiang's house a ruby bowl on the shelf behind Esther Landon caught the sun's rays and flashed them back in reddest fire. No setting could have been chosen better to frame her dark beauty. No setting could have been chosen more likely to divert the thunderbolt of Constance Farley's wrath. The beautiful was the best in life; but the beautiful demanded harmony, not conflict. One couldn't yield to the beautiful with wrath in one's heart.

The opening sentence with which she had planned just now to put Esther on the defensive, was forgotten. Instead she paused to exclaim:

"What superb color! That red flame." And because

she didn't accuse her, Esther, who had a child's heart, felt ashamed and softened. After all, she had nothing whatsoever against this girl except her attractiveness to Ko-Yiang.

"I am really awfully glad to see you," she said, rising and coming forward. "Naturally you want to know just what happened. Well, my dear, I think it was this: that sweet wine, combined with the warm, perfumed air, upset you."

"But you left me there—to come home and change your clothes. It was from four or five in the afternoon till six this morning."

"But I left you in good hands. Mr. Ko said it might make talk if we should carry you out of there unconscious."

"But not if you left me there with him?"

"You were not left with him. He came home with me. Besides, who is there to talk? I am the only white person who knows."

"Jerry Householder knows."

"Well, good old Jerry would think no ill of any woman."

"I am not so sure of that, and he has been very kind, like a brother. Perhaps you would explain it to him."

"Do you know what he would do? I know Jerry like a book. He'd walk up and down my prostrate body for leaving you there. I cannot afford to lose what little good will he has for me. Let's have tea and forget all about it."

With the tea came the change of topic. You cannot force an acquaintance, or even your best friend, to pursue an unpleasant theme of conversation. And with the change and the tea Mr. Ko came sauntering in, elegant in another costume, barbaric in its richness and color. Languor, the pallor of the ascetic, Constance noted as he came to take his seat beside her. Or was this the weariness and pallor of the man who dissipates his life, and that of others in the pursuit of pleasure?

He was waiting for her to speak. She was waiting for him. Esther looked uneasy as she watched them to see which would win.

When Constance broke the embarrassing silence it was to tell her how good the bread and marmalade tasted, her first real food for twenty-four hours.

Then Mr. Ko became solicitous. "I am so sorry for your upset. I hope you realize how sorry—how it was impossible to do other than as we did. If I can make this plain——"

"Explain it, please, to Mr. Householder."

"Householder!" he exclaimed hotly. "What is Householder to do with you and me? Why shall I explain anything to that Englishman?"

"He is responsible for my coming," she explained. "He is the only one of our party of four who was not present. I think he is entitled to hear from you all that happened."

As she talked Mr. Ko's eyebrows rose at their outer corners farther and farther; his mouth twisted itself into

a sneer. His eyes for once lost their sensuality and grew cold, black and cruel.

Something escaped his lips in his native tongue, something so ponderous in the way of a curse that if the gods obeyed it ten million years of burning fever with such a drought as would make the voyage of the ancient mariner a drunken orgy—this and more did that Chinese malediction pour out upon the soul of Jeremiah Householder.

The storm passed suddenly as it had come. The corners of Mr. Ko's eyebrows descended into their natural position. Something of the possessive look came back into his eyes, but the sneer remained.

"If you stop to think," he said, moving over very near so that he could touch her with his knee, "it is not fitting for you or me to explain our actions to—anyone."

Could she look him in the face and demand to know just what had happened during those short hours when she lay there unconscious? Would it do her any good? Was it likely that he would tell her the whole truth? No, it was useless to ask. She would never know. Perhaps it were better she should not know.

Thus she reasoned with herself, for, after all, was it fair to assume that so elegant a man, so polished, so conversant with the world, would take advantage of a woman's distress?

Jerry had been extremely kind and considerate, but he was not her brother. If he saw fit to think things—like

that—it only showed that Jerry was not so nice as he seemed.

Much of this reasoning Esther, watching her, read in her face. And Esther Landon was too decent by nature not to sympathize with her, to be sorry for her part in taking her there. Poverty, she explained to her Conscience, had driven her to do it—poverty of life as well as of means to enjoy it. She had done what nothing but poverty would ever have tempted her to do. Let those scoff and call her unnatural and base who never knew real temptation.

A pretty woman, avowedly pretty and admitted to be bright,—thrust away into the remotest corner of heathendom to live there day after day in the company of a corpse and a little man who was a failure and always would be a failure. Your so-called Morals mean little in any crisis like the Great War—in Christian lands. Here Christian Morals fade from exposure to Oriental light. One looks naturally first of all to self-preservation, which, in her case, was synonymous with pleasing Mr. Ko, gratifying his every whim.

"I have tried it without Ko," she concluded, "and I know how drab, how dull, how maddening monotony can be. I have tried it with Ko. One pays for life, luxury, wealth, ease—but it is worth the price. The prigs who say it is isn't are the lucky who have never had to make the choice."

And even as she thus eased that Conscience by her argu-

ment, she was no less sure in her heart of hearts that she had done a mean, unworthy thing. It helped a little that she did know that no harm had come to the American, that she had lent herself to no worse scheme than to see what Constance would do voluntarily under certain conditions, such as the relaxing influence of wine. But nothing beyond this.

"You do not hold resentment against me—for this—accident?" Mr. Ko asked as Constance was leaving. "It would distress me. I had so hoped we might be good friends, you and I. I think better than most Europeans you understand Eastern mind, Eastern love for Beauty, Eastern religious spirit—to find Worship in Nature."

Esther was upstairs. There were no jealous ears to hear. His voice, always soft, fell to a whisper. "Surely a beautiful woman need never be angry with one who worships only the beautiful."

He took her hand in his to say good-by. She could feel his trembling and wondered at the depth of his emotion, which seemed more than half sorrow lest he be misunderstood.

His eyes were narrow slits when he ushered her into his car, for he would not allow her to walk back to the hotel. Brushing aside the Number One Boy who stood ready with the light lap robe he insisted upon adjusting that himself. He took unnecessary pains in doing it. Number One Boy would have done it in less than half the time.

Constance drove home wondering more than ever. And

when she took the few steps from the car to the lift her eyes were wide with wonder, with unanswered questioning. It was thus that Jerry Householder saw her—and turned away without a sign of recognition.

CHAPTER XVIII

It was well enough for the Delphic oracle to preach. "Know thyself." Very few of us understand ourselves, and Jerry Householder was no exception to the rule. After his infatuation for Esther Landon, his despair when she flatly refused him, his subsequent discovery that he had invested her with qualities that she never possessed, Jerry was sure that he was intended by nature for a bachelor. Then came the War. With his usual impetuosity he gave heart, soul and body to the cause—would gladly have given his life.

These experiences changed him far more than he knew. They left him wiser, more self-contained, outwardly calmer, but at heart he was the same impulsive creature who had been called the Wild Man.

His conduct regarding the plot, upon which he had stumbled by chance, was proof that the old Jerry was not dead, the Jerry who acted while others paused to count the cost. Nor did he even suspect that the clever Mr. Ko was using him for his own ends, using him now in his pursuit of Constance Farley as blandly as at first he had planned to make him a foil in the conquest of Esther Landon.

That favor, like ripe fruit, had dropped into Mr. Ko's

lap. Wealth had proved so potent a charm in her case that she had either forgotten to fight or deemed nothing worth the risk. The result had been that her too easy surrender had left Ko-Yiang cold. He was clever enough to understand that the love of luxury and not his personal charm had won her. He desired her, but she was his too easily.

And then, suddenly, unexpectedly, had come this so different woman, slow where the other was quick, deep where the other was shallow. He wondered, and couldn't decide, whether she was also blunt, where the other was keen.

But one purpose lay in his mind regarding her: she should be his, body and soul—voluntarily yielding to him, for he was sufficiently a man of the world to understand that the difference between what is taken or bought, and mutual surrender, is vast. It is the difference between beer and the vintage wine, the difference between jazz and Schumann. Many, the majority, prefer beer and jazz. It is fortunate that it is so. Ko-Yiang's taste in every direction was that of the connoisseur. He could enjoy beer; he preferred a vintage wine.

Only yesterday Jerry had communed with himself about his attitude towards Constance. He was sure, as he reviewed the case, that when he left the hospitable roof of Sin Chang he thought of that girl only as a sister; jolly good company and all that sort of thing, a girl whom chance had thrown in his path, a girl of sufficient beauty to attract any man, but so matter of fact, so much like

a man in her way of looking at things—that you'd never think of getting up a flirtation. Falling in love was the very last thing a man would think of. She made no demands on you, didn't seem to expect attention or deference. In fact, she was that rare specimen that never played her sex. That was why he had brought her along. She was the best of company because she knew when to keep quiet. It was the last thing in the world that he, Jerry Householder, would ever do—to fall in love with a girl like that, a girl who didn't court it, didn't suggest it, or in any way encourage it.

Before he had finished his analysis he had decided that it had all begun from these very things—his admiration for her qualities. Then, as they had become comrades he had discovered a liking for her. Not only could she efface herself, but he found himself gradually more and more pleased with her company.

All this he could see clearly enough as he reviewed their short, unusual acquaintance. There was nothing like love in it, nothing that might not have been the same had she been a man and Fate had brought them together.

It was Ko-Yiang, that embodiment of Power, of Wealth, of Dominion, who had brought this sudden change of heart, who had revealed to him the unexpected depth of his own feelings. Was it possible that every woman had her price? Was it possible for a man of such vast resources, not only money but a rare education, an expert's knowledge of the treasures which filled his house, a fluent command of half a dozen languages, and per-

haps most important of all, an uncommon knowledge of human nature—was it possible for such a man to possess himself of any woman who was not so fortunately placed as to be above temptation?

While he was still asking himself these questions, while he was still wondering at the miracle which had befallen him, while he was speculating whether he had the slightest chance to win her in the face of Mr. Ko's seductive allurements—apparently the girl had spent the night with Mr. Ko at a house in the Chinese quarter.

This he had learned but five minutes before in a telephone conversation with Esther, whom he had asked point-blank: "I know that she was out all night with him. I want to know where they were."

"Why should you want to know?" she had asked. Even if she had refused Jerry, he was a very desirable and attractive man—far better than when she had laughed at his devotion. She wasn't at all sure, as she stood there at the other end of the line, that she wasn't a little sorry. Jerry was quite a dear, and as transparent as a child. Why should he be getting worked up over this American? Therefore she fenced, "Are you worried about her?"

"As a matter of fact, I am."

When to his concise answer he seemed disposed to add nothing by way of explanation, she asked again:

"Worried? Why should you be? Do you suspect her of—of anything so crude, so deliberate as that?"

"I don't suspect anything at all, but——"

There was a long, awkward pause before he found words to go on. A telephone is hardly the proper vehicle for confidences.

"It is certainly a strange performance. I thought it required some explanation. She went with you, and came back—without you."

He waited for her to explain it. Surely it couldn't be difficult for her to put the whole matter right. He was beginning to feel very much ashamed of such a coarse suspicion as had staggered him, causing him to forget what Constance was; not that type of woman—unless she were false in every phase.

The woman whom he had once loved, the woman at the other end of the line was not consciously base enough to poison his mind against the American. If men would be so stupid as to suspect the worst it was their own fault. She well knew that nothing serious had happened. Ko-Yiang was not a beast. He was doutbless sadly disappointed that the carefully concocted drink had been too powerful.

She herself had known that its pleasant warmth could lull to sleep a troublesome conscience while it stimulated to eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die. The whole thing was a regrettable accident; it wasn't a tragedy. Mr. Ko was a gentleman. He had taken his disappointment like a man. He would bide his time; doubtless he would try again. What a silly ass old Jerry was. He must have fallen in love with the girl. You could catch it in the very inflection of his voice.

"I don't want you to do her any injustice," she said aloud at last. "It wouldn't be fair by her. There isn't the slightest foundation for any such suspicion and you should know it without being told. Hello! Hello! Are you there?"

The line was dead. No one was there to hear that belated explanation. Jerry had gone.

"Silly ass," she exclaimed again as she hung up the instrument.

"Why will men be so suspicious! If I were in love with Ko Ko I think I might be frightfully jealous of that dreamy Farley woman. Jerry—think of Jerry, the impulsive, big boy; Jerry, losing his heart to her! Well—it's not my hunt. If he is fool enough to invent things—it's his own fault, not mine."

Without stopping to consider whether it were just or unjust, Jerry's first thought was to break away from an intolerable situation. It was plain to him that his services were no longer needed by Constance Farley, that he was now an outsider, that he couldn't keep on offering advice or assistance which was unwelcome.

He had thus far utterly neglected, in fact had forgotten the score of old friends who were living in Shanghai. He could not in honor go back to Yokohama while Ko-Yiang, who had been so keen in helping to thwart that plot, had need of him. Doubt, however, as to the plot itself had grown stronger in his mind as he looked back upon it. It could hardly have been a serious matter as he had at first believed; yet Ko-Yiang had even yesterday

hinted that he wasn't through with it. Which was quite true as Mr. Ko meant to use it. The way to forget one episode is to jump into another. "I have it," he mused, as he hurried along out Nanking Road. "I'll get my evening clothes and show up at the dance tonight in the Astor House ball room. They'll all be there, and we'll make a fresh start."

At Fokien Road, where the cross traffic is always heavy, he had to wait while the motley, ragged throng of ricksha boys trotted by tilting their long shafts high before them so that the weight of the carriage pressed upward on their hands, as their sandal-shod feet flew lightly over the metal road.

Loads of merchandise on two wheeled trucks came rumbling by drawn by ropes over the shoulders of coolies, all ragged in patched tatters of blue cotton, all anxiously watching the tall policeman wielding his long baton striped with black and white.

Borne on the shoulders of four men came a costly litter of lacquered wood. Inside a fat elderly Chinese sat blinking through silk curtains. The men uttered a staccato Hi-Ha, Hi-Ha as they swung by, their shoulders straining under the bamboo poles.

Motor cars in line waited the signal to move along Nanking Road. Tram cars in pairs, green and white, first and third class, packed with men and women, waited on their narrow gauge tracks beside the motor cars. Dozens of rickshas next the gutter waited also their turn to go on.

A big closed car of English make, lilac in color, shining with polished silver, blared with insolent, protesting horn. The tall *Sikh* waved his black and white wand. Traffic along Fokien Road was so suddenly halted that one ricksha boy, half over the crossing, incurred the stern officer's displeasure and was promptly knocked down.

A wave to the lilac car, and Nanking Road was alive again, the chariot of Wealth in the van, even the rickshas close to the curb dashing on with scarce room enough to move.

As the lilac car went by him, Jerry saw in it a Chinese, gorgeously dressed, alone. It was Ko-Yiang, and he went in the direction of the Palace Hotel where Constance was.

Jerry thought that he watched the car unmoved, with a shrug of the shoulders, for he had carefully dismissed Constance and all that pertained to her forever from his mind.

As he walked out as far as the Country Club he was arguing with himself for and against Constance Farley. Angry at his own abstraction which had caused him to go so far out of his way, he turned back at a brisk pace, but after a dozen steps his thoughts had flown back to the same distressing question.

Half an hour later he came from the tailor shop of Ya Chong, facing the Race Track. Some men were out with new ponies trying them out for the races. One was having an awful time with a fighting gray that had made up its mind never to submit to a rider. Here was something to divert the current of his thoughts. He

strolled across the road, through the gate and encountered the fighting gray ridden by an old friend of college days. "Tad Harkness, you old dog, come off that pony and give me a chance at him."

"My word! Jerry Householder!" and the other was off in a twinkling, holding the pony by the reins thrown over his arm. "And what are you doing here, Jerry? That is—are you staying long? I haven't seen you at the club. Now, see here, you will dine with us tonight. You're not married, are you, and all that sort of thing?"

To all of which Jerry had responded only by shakes of the head. Something of his old laughter and gay spirit seemed to come with this old friend. Once more he was the irresponsible, irrepressible Jerry of college days.

"Never mind clothes," he insisted. "Let me have a go at this sweet tempered beast, will you? I need a bit of a tussle. I've been getting soft as an old woman."

If he needed a tussle the gray pony did his best to furnish one. Men came out from the lockers to see the fun, for without whip or spur or curb, using only the snaffle, Jerry bestrode that horse as if he had been a part of him not to be shaken off or intimidated by rearing or plunging. In the end the man's patience won; the beast, neither broken in spirit by cruelty, nor suffering bodily pain, had yielded to his superior, and knew it.

For Jerry nothing could have better restored his equilibrium. He was glad to accept his friend's invitation to dine and go on to the Astor House dance. Now he

would get back into the life to which he was accustomed, among the friends whom he understood.

That night he drank, flirted and danced until two in the morning. His was the zest of the novice again, the tireless energy of the débutante, the enthusiasm of the neophyte. He had all but offered himself to a charming blonde girl whom he had never met before, simply on the strength of having known her brother who was killed in the war. That or the strength of the whiskey and sodas taken without stint, like all the rest of it.

In the handsome hotel lobby the bar boy in black and red pushed to and fro the wagon well stocked with bottles and with racks from which depended glasses, polished, gleaming glasses inviting to be filled. Women, English, French, American, danced, laughed and drank, smoked cigarettes, and led men on to see how far they could be led; to check them suddenly as Jerry had checked the gray that they might feel the bit.

It was morning, but what is dawn to those who have dined early at eight-thirty and begun to dance and play the game of life at eleven!

It was morning. The gay foreign butterflies, wearied with pleasure, were going to their homes. Outside, ricksha boys waited for such as had no motor cars; they waited patiently through the long hours hoping to add a few cents to the seventy-five which are their average daily earnings.

The Bund was quiet save for the unsteady voices of

a few men coming back from the French quarter and a night begun at the new Maxim's Café.

On the water front the moonlight danced as gaily on muddy wavelets as if they had been crystal pure.

A sampan nosed along the jetties cautiously seeking a chance to land its belated cargo, so cautiously that one suspected opium or other contraband. The big ships anchored off in the stream lay in parallel lines, anchored to buoys and swept to the limit of their chains by the current. The faint music of four bells was wafted ashore, repeated from ship to ship. It was morning and on one ship the blue peter was being hoisted at the foremast. A cloud of black smoke poured from her funnel and hung above her like a giant bat with outspread wings.

Jerry sauntering back to his hotel saw all this, unmoved, until a sudden impulse came to him to get back to Japan, to shake the dust of Ko-Yiang's Shanghai from his feet, to forget the past few months and live once more among his own kind. A little sleep and then he too would hoist his blue peter to show that the day had come for him to up anchor and sail away—from shallow water out into the deep.

CHAPTER XIX

WITH a new day came new thoughts. From his window Jerry could see the barefoot ricksha boys dodging in and out of the traffic, miraculously escaping collisions. The usual number of business men stood, or sat as if on the point of standing, in the low one-horse carriages on the Bund, always stepping out while the carriage was in motion, always dashing frantically up the steps of bank or office as one just in time with a reprieve.

Already he was less certain of the wisdom of immediate departure. It was too late for regular breakfast. The room boy brought tea and toast. One must think it over, not decide too hastily.

It had been their invariable custom to breakfast together. He couldn't prevent speculating as to whether she had missed his company. It was now two hours past their usual time.

From the nearest jetty a little party of half a dozen were departing in a trim launch to go aboard that palatial houseboat out there on the Whang-poo. Flowers and delectable baskets were their chief impedimenta. The man was Chinese. It was unusual to see European women with Chinese gentlemen. Mr. Ko was the one conspicuous exception, Mr. Ko who had lived so much abroad that

he seemed European. However, unlike so many Orientals, he never adopted European dress. He was too much an artist to make that mistake.

So Jerry ruminated watching the party bobbing merrily in the launch on its way to the houseboat. The day was so hot one might well plan to get out of town.

So much Jerry saw. He could not see that with rare tact and thoughtfulness Ko-Yiang had invited three Americans to meet Constance, that he had chosen three who possessed charm, people such as Constance would enjoy. There was a single man about his own age, a married couple younger. With the vivacious Mrs. Landon to keep it going, Mr. Ko had set great store by this two days' excursion. It would surely do much to dispel any suspicions of his last party. He would try every arrow in his quiver before he gave up the attempt to win Constance Farley for his collection.

With the nicest care imaginable everything was done to bring her into prominence, yet done so skilfully that no one would suspect it had been planned. Esther Landon, clever as she was, had no suspicion.

As they sat comfortably watching the river life, a constantly changing picture of struggle for existence, Constance pointed out a woman who with a child strapped on her back had been tending sail on a sampan, at the same time working a long oar over the side by walking a step or two forward, a step or two back, meanwhile pushing and pulling as her bare feet trod the slippery deck. As they watched her, contrasting in their minds their

lot with hers, a cabbage came floating on the muddy tide. The woman saw it, strained frantically at the heavy oar to swing the boat nearer, then, about to miss it, leaned perilously over the side, calling shrilly to her man up forward mending a net to come to her help.

Constance saw the man with a grin exposing long teeth encourage the woman to greater effort. One bare foot flew up and caught the mast. The woman lay half out of the boat. The bundle on her back never stirred. With a shout of joy her brown fingers caught the treasure, drew it in. The man reached forward to take it from her. Being poor he had but one wife. She might be allowed to share the cabbage with him at noon, boiled in rain water. It would give new flavor and relish to the rice.

"What is life?" Constance exclaimed to one of her fellow countrymen. "Is that life—or is this?"

And he, being the elderly bachelor, answered, "Some fell on stony ground, some fell by the wayside——"

"Yes," she agreed, "chance is the sower. But it seems horribly unfair. That's why socialists are always trying to invent a scheme to even things up."

"And they fail," Esther put in, "because you can't grow roses from turnip seed."

Mr. Ko smiled indulgently, but the dark eyes narrowed perceptibly, and the long yellow hands extended themselves like the hands of a preacher who invokes the divine blessing on what contribution is about to fall into the plate.

"One may help—benefit—even the turnip seed sometimes," he said as one who recites an epigram.

"This is not allegory—concrete example. If I can reach Korean common people through your friend Sin Chang I stop at once the feud which already springs up from that plot which Mr. Householder has discovered. Plot itself is no more, but reprisals, yes, and bitterness which will mean killing many—both sides—before it shall be finished."

"And you think Sin Chang could help?" Constance asked now much interested.

"Help very much if—if he believe Japanese can be trusted, or his own people. You—" he added slowly looking straight into her eyes—"you could do this—this work for the people, the common people of Japan, of Korea, and so of my own—China, all the turnip seed."

"Do you mean you'd like to have me go to him?"

"First, dear lady, I would have you satisfy yourself what are the facts. Then go back with me to explain the truth to that Korean giant who has many friends at Taiden and to the north at Seoul."

"But would such a man have influence outside his immediate neighborhood?" Constance asked, her brow wrinkling with the puzzled look that Mr. Ko loved to see.

"By himself, no," he answered. "As agent for one who would spend much money to foster better feelings, yes!"

"Why are you so interested in Korea?" Esther Landon asked. "I cannot see why people who aren't forced to do it ever get mixed up in politics—even at home."

"One has interests, you see," he explained. "To protect our interests it is wise that we prevent the little plots. Japanese make a plot against Korea. Very well. Koreans make plots against Japan. It is the same with my country. All these plots interfere with government, with development of natural resources, with progress. If you will excuse frankness, the worst danger, the greatest evil today in Eastern countries is Western civilization. It comes faster than the people can digest it. It makes unrest, discontent. Even coolie class get Western money fever. They hear other countries poor people may rise to another class. Here in my country the coolies live and die coolies. Now they hear different story. Those who went over to the war to dig trenches have brought new ideas. They turn bandits, rob and kill to get money. Everything brings corrupt politics. No stability anywhere and Christian missionaries make it worse always. Too much talk of equality—excuse this outburst," he ended suddenly. "I feel too strongly, I fear for my poor country."

"But you spoke also of Japan," said one of the Americans.

"Yes, of Japan, for it is also true of all Eastern civilization. Europe and America have brought us their science, their religion, their culture. They have sown the wind. Some day comes—the whirlwind."

"And your present object is——?"

"To prevent Eastern nations that they distrust each other. To cultivate friendships—to get away from

thoughts, always of war, of conquest. History of all countries has shown me War is the great curse. It ruins countries, it makes no man wiser. No man's home, family, property is ever secure. You see," he added, smiling that inscrutable smile not wholly friendly, "I am not an altogether disinterested patriot. I wish to live in peace. I give willingly for this safety. Are not all men so? One is for war—why? That he may get. Another is for peace that he may keep what he now has. Well—I am for peace."

"If this yacht is peace," Esther said, "I think we are all for peace."

"Hah," exclaimed the host, "I almost forget—just in time you remind me. Each lady shall dress for tiffin in Chinese dress which you find in your cabin, please."

He clapped his hands twice. A boy appeared, silently but instantly. To the master's question came favorable reply, for Mr. Ko in the best of humor announced: "Yes, please, everything is ready in the cabins."

Constance found spread out on her bed a silk costume in two shades of blue brocade with trousers of plum color. A panel in the front of the tunic was exquisitely embroidered in black and gold. There were pale blue socks and black and gold slippers. Beside the costume in a silk case reposed a necklace of green jade.

With a child's enthusiasm for dressing up she entered into the spirit of it as she saw herself finally, even to the showy ornaments for the hair, transformed into a Chinese

lady, that rarest phenomenon, a Chinese lady with the blue eyes of an Irish girl!

On her way to the deck she kept one hand on the string of jade beads. She had seen enough of jade to know their value.

The artist in Mr. Ko was evident from the skill with which each costume harmonized with the wearer. Only Esther in red and white and gold took in the jade necklace and its significance, for Esther alone understood Mr. Ko. And understanding she was too wise to show jealousy of a rival, and thereby make herself a less agreeable guest.

"Borrowed finery is not to be despised," she chirped. "Do you know, Ko Ko,"—this was her pet name for him and so audacious that he liked it—"when I was dressing I had a brilliant inspiration as to the origin of the hired dress suit."

Mr. Ko had never heard of the hired dress suit, and had to have it explained. But he helped by asking, "Is it then a very old custom?"

"It goes back to the Bible," Esther declared solemnly, "to the Old Testament, at that, where you can read in many places the saying, 'and he rent his clothes.'"

Once more Mr. Ko asked to have it explained, but the arrival of the boy to announce tiffin saved her that embarrassment. More than once Mr. Ko had expounded to her that humor was for children and fools.

"What is the soul of a feast? Miss Farley I am very

sure can tell us," Mr. Ko asked the question as they took their places at table, and gave the others no opportunity to answer.

"I suppose it is a riddle," Constance said, turning to her host, who had given her the seat of honor. "But I am going to spoil it by literalness. The soul is conversation. Without it a feast is dead."

"Ah," Mr. Ko assented. "There is ancient saying, 'Wine is the soul of the feast.' Maybe this is because wine stimulates the conversation. Let us try this to make a test."

Constance's first thought was of the last time when she drank with him and Esther Landon. This time she did not drain the glass, but watchful of herself and the others noted how soon the inhibition of self-consciousness showed itself in easier, merrier companionship. The married American was flirting desperately with Mrs. Landon until his wife upset things by asking across the table, "And where is Mr. Landon? I've heard so much about him."

"So much?" Esther repeated. "Why, there isn't that much to hear. He's up towards Kiu Kiang fussing over a worthless mine."

"I wouldn't be a man for a million," said the American woman enigmatically.

Esther nodded, and muttered: "That's a tidy sum. I think I'd try it for that."

"There are men and men," said the husband.

"Not in Shanghai," Esther corrected. "There are men

and women—altogether too many women, too few men. In an ideal place there are ten men to one woman."

The American woman hereupon adjusted her eyeglasses for a better look at this phenomenon. "What says Miss Farley to such a proportion?" asked the bachelor.

"When I lived in Seoul," she answered, so slowly that her questioner who was a lawyer repeated, to hurry her along: "Yes—yes—when you were in Seoul."—"We had a poet there, a young man with Divine Fire and a retreating chin, who wrote a poem on Comradeship. I read the first sixty stanzas. In the sixtieth he hadn't got so far as to tell what it was."

"What had he told?" Esther asked.

"Thus far only what it wasn't——"

"Huh!" exclaimed the host, "a great poet of my country asked to write on piece of paper what is test of truest friendship—handed back the paper saying: 'This' and pointed to the blank page. Not battle, not excitement—plain monotony."

"There is deep philosophy in that," Constance said.

"I am glad you understand," Mr. Ko said filling his own glass and hers from the decanter.

"I love best to travel with one who can appreciate long silences. You see the same thing, the blue grandeur of deep ocean, the solemn, awful majesty of mountains. You do not spoil it all by babbling: 'Do you see this which I am seeing?' True companionship sees, and, like the mountains and the moon, it is silent."

"He describes an ideal travelling companion," thought

Constance. Which was exactly what he meant for her to think. Now he let the conversation drift, rather than steered it, to discuss Conventions—the unwritten laws by which other people tie our hands, laws to which we submit because we are afraid.

Constance again was moved to tell of the old days in Seoul. "We had a censor there, a Methodist woman, with a face like an angry rabbit, who knew just what was right and what was wrong. She had a rabbit's brain."

"Had she a very large family?" asked the bachelor, whereupon Esther Landon laughed aloud, then expostulated, "Methodists never stand on all four legs."

"Don't you mean metaphors?" asked the woman with the eyeglasses.

"The average woman, especially, misses half of life for fear of Mrs. Grundy," said Mr. Ko, not to be diverted from the topic.

"Well, the half she gets can be very pleasant," Esther added.

Ko-Yiang watched the woman at his right. It was her comment for which he waited. Seeing this she vouchsafed, "I am so unconventional it were best that I should express no opinion for fear of shocking some one." It struck Mr. Ko that no other human being had so fascinating a way of holding a cigarette. How much of his admiration was it safe to let her know? She was different from other women; doubtless she loved admiration—who doesn't? But this woman's very naturalness was disarming. Every time he looked into those big blue eyes

he lost himself in their depths. It was easy for these his guests to laugh and jest. They had come for that. But for him this house boat party would decide whether his plan would work, whether by playing the girl's sympathies he could use her Korean admirer, Sin Chang, to get her away from other people, especially from that eccentric Englishman. He felt sure that back in the mountains, working, as she would believe, to help the Koreans to a better understanding—well, from then on, his plan was carefully laid.

That she had great emotional possibilities he had no doubt. Experience teaches; in experience he held a doctor's degree.

So let his guests laugh. It was serious business for him. He must make no mistake.

It was stupid of him, but every time he looked at her his heart thumped and pounded in his ears. He told himself that only the novice lost his breath and saw black specks floating. It was now many years ago that he had had any such boyish symptoms. He longed to tell her of it. His lips undirected framed the words:

"Something, I find, intoxicates me, me the man Shanghai calls cold, immovable, unemotional." It was scarce above his breath, but she caught it. "You! I thought you were case hardened. You will not be as silly as I was—and faint?"

She leaned forward to see his eyes more clearly, interested at once and sympathetic. But her interest was that of the trained nurse. He thanked his gods that his lan-

guage had been so vague. One must try again, more subtly. Perhaps the strange creature had never yet been deeply stirred. None in all his list of adventures had been so puzzling. Was there not an ancient saying of the Chinese, "The fish that rises to no bait must be taken with the net!"

"Ladies," he said as they rose from the table, "you will please each one accept the costume as little gift to remember this party."

Esther saw Constance's hand instinctively move to the costly necklace of jade. The watchful host saw it also and coming close to her side said, "It is but a part of the costume, please!"

"But this is so valuable," she protested.

"My regret is that I have not something better, more worthy to offer one whose heart goes out so warm to my poor country."

CHAPTER XX

Opportunity knocks oftener than once at the door of those favored mortals who travel as guests on a house boat. A less cunning man would have welcomed the opportunities to be alone with the desired Constance, to allow contiguity to work its spell, finally to take advantage of the three principles of first aid to one who has felt the sting of Cupid's dart: wine, seclusion, darkness.

On the one occasion when they were thus left to themselves, the other four having gone inside for a game of bridge, Mr. Ko came and took a seat beside her on the broad yellow and black couch where she was comfortably propped with pillows. A little stand beside them held a tray with glasses, whiskey and soda, a decanter of old Madeira.

A dragon screen stood between them and the door of the saloon. The only light save the glow of their cigarettes and the faint twinkling of stars dimly seen from under the awning, was the one swinging deck lamp, the very lamp that Esther Landon had seen one night and never would forget.

Tonight even the one lamp was dimmed by a yellow shade. The voices of the card players came indistinctly after each hand when the woman with the eyeglasses could be heard explaining how no one could have played

that particular hand better than she had, but luck had absolutely forsaken her ever since their next door neighbor had brought home a black cat.

Then came the knock of a pack on edge being straightened out by hitting the table—the swish of cards shuffled by snapping alternately in the two hands. Then silence, the business of play, serious business the husband of the eyeglasses thought, for his clever wife invariably lost.

What an opportunity in all this luxury, quiet comfort, listening now to the murmur of the river, the gentle heartbeat of the engine—what a rare opportunity to speak of love!

Had Mr. Ko-Yiang been a lover he must have given some expression to the pain in his heart. He must have risked it all that night, pleaded with this adorable woman, laid before her the advantages of possessing these luxuries, a man's devotion and wealth. He must have staked all on these surroundings and a night such as this.

Mr. Ko-Yiang was a collector. In his crown were gathered already many rare jewels, records of other quests and conquests. Nothing in all the world was so desirable just then as this inscrutable woman. His desire for her was greater than any other wish or thought in life.

But Mr. Ko-Yiang, winner of many a battle, many a race, many a game, knew in his heart that his zeal for collecting would outlive every other passion, knew that this star, once it were placed in his diadem, would not be the

last, nor would his trained eye cease to look for perfection.

"How calm it is," he muttered, "so peaceful to sit with a friend, and understand the silence."

She made no reply. The thought had come to her: what would she give to control such wealth? What was the value of Luxury. Was it worth what she suspected it had cost Esther Landon? Was anything enough to pay a woman who didn't love?

Constance Farley hadn't the restricted outlook of a small town housewife. What God hath joined together meant to her what it means to men and women whose horizon lies far beyond the post office and village store. It means the convention known as marriage, openly flaunted by the theatrical profession, ignored when inconvenient by the best society, but something to which the rest must answer and give implicit obedience under sanction of clergy.

"Well," her thought ran, "it's a salutary convention. I know of no better substitute."

The man beside her lay back enjoying his smoke, too sensitive, too understanding, this unfathomable Oriental, to intrude upon her thoughts. How seldom one found such delicacy among one's own countrymen. And once she had almost suspected him, had been quite rude to Esther who had left her alone with him!

An hour passed. With a stab of self-reproach she broke the silence: "You are so indulgent, so considerate a host that I have forgotten the duty of a guest. I am sorry."

"Sorry?" he said. "Surely not sorry if we are found congenial. So great is the compliment to me if I am found congenial in the most beautiful eyes that ever opened to look upon my country's offerings."

From some one else she was sure this would sound like claptrap. Coming so calmly from the lips of this Oriental she tingled with a strange sense of joy. He had not praised her. His flattering opinion had unconsciously come out in words.

"I wonder," he asked, "if in that silence you have given consideration to my request—for my country and for your Korea. Is it too much sacrifice that I ask?"

"You have asked very little," she answered simply. "You have asked a disregard of conventions from one who never cared a straw for convention. I will go back with you to Sin Chang whenever you like. You understand that I have enough money to pay my own way,—enough, if I am careful, to last me for three or four years. Before that time is up I shall go back home and earn my living as I have always done. So please understand I am to pay my own way."

Silence again. He was thinking. Presently he spoke: "I can see how it is that you feel. You know my willingness, my desire to pay. I have so much money. It means nothing, nothing to me. If you feel more happy to spend your own money—it is for you to say."

"Thank you," she answered, "how understanding you are!"

She dropped her hand beside her. It touched his

which felt singularly cold for a summer night. Like a cat his long hand turned over and seized her fingers, yet held them so tenderly they were not imprisoned, only detained. She could not see the yellow light shining in those narrow eyes. She could not hear the thumping of his pulses. Slowly, not to wound so sensitive a man, she drew her hand from his. He made no effort to retain it.

"You are not like any woman I have known," he said solemnly. "You are so much above them as they are above the beasts of the field. To know you lifts a man above the gross things of the world. He would do great things that he might deserve your praise. He would crush underneath every evil passion or desire that he might be fit for your company. Such a woman has but to live, to let men know her, and the world is made a better place."

He had fallen into the Oriental impersonal manner which seems a sort of mysticism. What he had uttered seemed therefore a declaration of faith. This praise which might so easily be mistaken for a lover's fantastic declaration of his infatuation.

"You do not know me," she answered. "I am not in the least that exalted character."

"You would be the last to recognize it if you were," he argued.

For just a moment his strong hand covered both of hers as they lay in her lap. The convulsive grasp was the breaking from restraint; it spoke a language unlike the

language of his lips, a terrifying revelation of the soul that hungers. Then it was gone. Once more he was the calm critic of life, the poet, the dreamer, the interpreter of dreams.

It was then that he quoted "Our best poet has expressed us: 'He that is not both soul and body is either more or less than man.'"

"You have nothing to fear, I am quite sure," was Constance's comment.

"And you?"

"Well," she confessed, "I am an unknown quantity even to myself."

"You are a quadratic equation. One must know the rule to solve it."

"Ah, as a Chinese you believe in rules—for women."

"Oh, no, only rules for understanding them. The deepest study of mankind is woman."

"You are murdering Alexander Pope, but I suppose it doesn't trouble your conscience."

"No, because what I have confessed is a greater truth than his."

"Doubtless you have been quite thorough in your—study of the subject?" She rose as she thus ended the discussion. It had gone already as far as she was interested to pursue it.

"It is because I have made deep study of the subject," he insisted, "that I know its philosophical side. The young and ignorant play at living, only the experienced and wise—live." They were crossing the deck, about to

enter the saloon where the others were absorbed in their game. Mr. Ko stopped and faced her.

"This thought is in my mind," he said. "My life is of settled plan. I know where and what I shall be in one year or in ten. With you it is different. Your life is unsettled. Your future is not known——"

"And that," she broke in, "is the best thing about it—that very uncertainty—I should hate to know."

As they rejoined the others Constance was impressed with the fact that not even by an insinuating smile did any one suggest that there existed a touch of sentiment between them. Had the rich, attractive and accomplished host been a European, the women would have scanned her face for evidence. He was of a different race. One assumed that no physical attraction existed.

"Now, if you had a phonograph," Esther Landon said, "we could dance."

"I cannot see myself dancing," Mr. Ko answered, "nor can I enjoy to hear songs from boxes."

"I see," she retorted in the teasing mood which she had so often adopted with Peter Landon. "If singers entice thee consent thou not."

"That is not correct," he started to explain, but the boy entering with a huge tray of bottles and glasses and a bowl of ice put an end to banter which Ko-Yiang could never understand, substituting wine which he knew as an expert.

CHAPTER XXI

"And if you will return tomorrow by *Shinyo Maru* to Yokohama, one in Government confidence will some day call at Grand Hotel, Y. Takaishi; you can trust this man."

Thus ended the letter from Mr. Ko-Yiang which Jerry Householder was reading at breakfast. It had been brought by one of Mr. Ko's boys, and it stated that the writer had been suddenly called away. Inquiry at the office revealed that Constance was out of town for a few days. Then she had been one of the party he had seen going aboard Ko-Yiang's yacht. He was almost glad it was so. His conscience would be clear if he left a note of farewell, for such it was, explaining why he had gone off in such haste.

The T. K. K. office had him booked before tiffin. He had but to drop into the Shanghai Club to say good-by to a few friends, write a note or two, and the business was done.

Next day at noon he leaned on the rail of the *Shinyo* as she steamed northeast from Woosung—his thoughts travelling back to Shanghai, to its gay life, to the friends left behind.

Esther Landon—how she had degenerated and all because she would sell her soul for Luxury and Ease. Ko was a strange fellow. Education had made him restless,

never satisfied. But Ko was a patriot, a rare treasure just now in his country.

He left the rail and went aft to the smoking room, where a number of Japanese played with little cards bearing strange images of flowers. It was an interesting game to the players, but how you missed the flat headed king and the four familiar suits or rather—pursuits, represented by the four familiar tokens—the four L's: Labor, Law, Love and Luxury.

Two men were there whom he had known in business. Soon he was talking with them in their own language of things Japanese. How quickly in the East one's environment is revolutionized! The recent life dropped away, a discarded garment; the old life came back to claim him.

On the sixth day he stepped ashore in Yokohama, gay and attractive even in late August.

The usual number of steamers lay anchored in the pretty harbor, surrounded by barges and flat boats dancing up and down like the sunlight on the choppy waves. The same waiting line of jinrickshas at the pier, the same little horse-drawn loads going through the streets preceded by the driver who seemed to be towing his horse. The same clumping, clicking, clattering of wooden clogs on the pavement. Men in sober kimonos and men in European dress. Women in brighter kimonos, their backs grotesque with the broad bright obi. Children in brilliant kimonos, gay with many colors; schoolboys in blue kimonos dotted with white spots. Babies in the kimonos of mothers or sisters to whose backs they were

strapped. Color and life everywhere; life and the sounds of life, never harsh, never crushing with the weight and rush and ruthlessness of our boasted civilization. A gentler, simpler, calmer life that was sweet to hear and to see, so Jerry thought. A life which like all Oriental life has also its own smell—but that, if one analyses it, tells also its own story.

Japan again, so different from China, yet in some ways so like it. Different as London from Vienna; like as Brussels to Berlin.

Jerry Householder was glad to be back in bright, cheerful Yokohama. The Grand Hotel hadn't changed. One might believe that group of Englishmen in the lounge was identical with the group he left there. The few scattered women eyeing each other furtively over their magazines; that one leaning back to smoke her cigarette with graceful abandon knew perfectly well that her legs were quite fetching in those pinkish silk stockings. Surely she was the one he had noticed so long ago in that precise spot. And the two old cronies yonder drinking whiskey-Tansan, talking exchange and the high price of Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank shares. It was like getting home. Then when the boy came to tell him his luggage was in his room, how pleasant to speak Japanese once more, how satisfying to be inhaled with the characteristic national hissing sound which is so the very opposite of a hiss.

He had almost forgotten the charm of this picture book country and its gentle citizens.

From his room he could see the steel bridge over the canal, the road winding up the hill on to the Bluff where the foreign residents lived. A few of the nearest houses could be made out quite plainly. It would be delightful, after all his recent disturbing experiences, to get back among one's friends, for he had many friends in that little colony on the Bluff.

A man was a good deal of an ass to mix himself up in squabbles as he had done. It proved only that he hadn't outgrown his old stupid impetuosity, the traits that had sent him out to the East a young man not stable enough for a Britisher in his own land.

So his thoughts ran as he stretched out in the long bamboo chair before his open window.

What unimportant things, trifles, changed the course of our lives! He had thought himself settled in life as a business man. He had stumbled upon that little plot, and because he had been fascinated to follow it through —see how far afield it had led him! Sin Chang and his dark-eyed bride, Yisan. He never would have known of their existence. And they had led to Constance Farley. Here he closed his eyes. For a long time an observer, had there been one present, would have thought him asleep.

When he opened his eyes they were not the eyes so recently gazing calmly at the Bluff and the Bund and the waters of the bay playfully jumping up to kiss the shore or slap the long stretch of breakwater running out to make the harbor one of the prettiest and safest in the world.

Those eyes had grown hard, almost cruel, when he opened them. It was not the thought of Constance that had changed them. He had gone on from her to that strange man who had so suddenly come into both of their lives through his long-forgotten friend, Esther Landon.

That, too, was all through the same pesky plot. Suddenly, as all things came to him, flashed upon his mind the suspicion, the belief, that no Mr. Takaishi would call upon him; that he had been packed off in haste by the wily Mr. Ko to get him out of the way; that Mr. Ko's interest in that confounded Japanese plot was only an interest in Mr. Ko's specialty—women; that Mr. Ko had never done and never would do anything except in so far as it furthered his own plans.

Where did this place Constance? Did it leave her also a victim of Ko-Yiang's cleverness and design, a pawn in the game where Nature had obviously intended her for a queen?

There was no evidence to that effect. Constance Farley was certainly the opposite of impulsive. In her calm, deliberate way she played with life as most others did. After all, it was with her own life. She didn't interfere in the lives of other people. If he, Jerry Householder, had seen fit to entangle himself there it might have been the work of Mr. Ko or of Sin Chang, or Esther's interference, but he couldn't honestly lay the charge against Constance Farley.

It all ended, as he lay there at his bedroom window, in a definite conclusion: whatever the reason, whoever the

cause, he was quite through with Constance forever. He sincerely hoped that he was through with Ko-Yiang likewise. The man didn't ring true from the very start.

A sudden resolution seized him to attempt at this late day what he should have done before he fled the country with those chaps close on his heels. Had he gone straight to Tokyo he might have learned there whether their plot was of consequence, or only one of the bubbles that come to the surface after much submerged discussion,—come to the surface to burst and perish.

An hour later he was in Tokyo, whither he had gone by trolley train. The police officials at first pretended not to understand anything about it, but when he mentioned dates and even names they relented so far as to show him the record of the arrest of the ringleader, the fat man, to whom the others had listened with reverence.

That was enough. He thanked them and started back to Yokohama. In the first class car, painted blue and marked with a — which is Japanese for "one," he sat in a corner unmindful of the spittoons in a row in the very centre of the car, unmindful of the half dozen men who, kicking off their clogs, sprawled all over the seats, unmindful of the conversation wholly intelligible to him, expressive of dislike for the foreigners who year by year encroached more and more upon their rights, their customs and sacred traditions.

Jerry had no room for these things in his mind. He had just arrived at a point where he saw things clearly; where he saw the rich and powerful Mr. Ko-Yiang not as

a romantic figure of the new Chinese Republic, not as the cultivated man of the world who because of his wide knowledge had also a wide sympathy.

Mr. Ko's peculiarities had nothing whatever to do with his race. They had to do only with his character, the devices and desires of his own heart, the lusts of the flesh, the exercise of vast wealth in gratifying his appetite.

But why hadn't he, Jerry Householder who had surely knocked about a bit, been bright enough to see that long ago? Instead of living his own life after chucking up his business, he had been nothing in the world but the tool of the accomplished Mr. Ko, that ardent collector who even now was adding a new and flawless gem to his collection.

The morning paper announced in its long list of arrivals and sailings that the Nippon Yusen Kaisha were sending the *Suwa Maru* on the afternoon of the 20th via Kobe, Nagasaki and Shanghai for London.

"That means today," he told himself. "It means—here, boy!" as he leaped from the little train on its arrival again in Yokohama. "N. Y. K. office and lively—I give forty sen more for fast run."

"Forty sen more—to boy—on top price?" asked the ricksha boy who had known disappointment and grief.

"That's right."

The younger jinricksha boys can run fast and far when they see an object in so doing. They have grown wise. This one chosen by Jerry dashed off at great speed.

Thus it befell that Jerry Householder's name appeared

in the next edition as one arriving from Shanghai and in the adjoining column as one departing for Shanghai.

"Why," exclaimed the anxious proprietor of the Grand Hotel, "you haven't even had tiffin. You're here a couple of hours and off you go."

Jerry had to explain that it was no fault of the hotel; that he had received important news.

He was the last man to go aboard as the big whistle of the *Suwa Maru* uttered its deep bass farewell to those who waited on the pier and waved and bowed as only Japanese can bow.

Out between the red and the white lighthouses, out by the big fort and the ship yards, and through the multitude of fishing boats, out to where they looked back at Mt. Oshima smoking, glowing ominously from its lofty crater.

Jerry sauntered on the upper deck, for it was warm.

It was necessary to take account of stock, to ask himself as the only one who could by any chance find a reasonable answer—why he had come. Up to that moment he had held no clear purpose or understanding of this question.

Was it not true that a few short hours ago he had definitely decided that he was through with Constance Farley, that her affairs no longer concerned him? For what other conceivable reason did he now find himself rushing back to Shanghai? Was he acting so blindly that he had no purpose, no plan?

The cynical smile of Mr. Ko, the curling lip and contemptuous eye of one who despises and sneers, appeared

before him to answer such doubts. It had nothing to do with Constance Farley. It had to do solely with Ko-Yiang. He must let Mr. Ko understand that his cunning no longer made a fool of Jerry Householder. It was his duty also to have a frank talk with Esther. He had no wish to control her, but as a very old friend he ought to warn her.

You might get angry with Esther, you might be disgusted, even, but everyone had to admit that she was attractive to look at, and bright enough to keep the best of them on edge—as she generally did.

Therefore, when the tall, fair Englishman appeared for dinner in a cool white suit no one in the saloon suspected the turmoil that was in his heart. To those of the passengers who were English it seemed nothing strange that a man travelling had no wish to add to his list of acquaintances.

That ancient doctrine of being especially kind to strangers because you may be entertaining angels unawares, does not appeal to the British. Jerry was not looking for angels as the lovely girl at his table soon discovered. He actually seemed not to know that she was there, but that was not her fault, for she tried every artifice known to science. The tall, fair Englishman was planning exactly what he should say to Mr. Ko, what to Esther and even what to Constance in case he found it necessary to say anything to her. Jerry Householder's mind was preoccupied that night.

CHAPTER XXII

When Jerry was coming up on the tender he knew that he was going to stay at the Astor House Hotel, the particular reason being that there he would avoid Constance Farley. One need not engage; in August there would be room enough.

On the customs jetty the formality was soon over. He found a porter with the insignia of Palace Hotel, gave him his various pieces, and carrying a small bag in his hand crossed the Bund and entered the Palace Hotel, where the clerk was so surprised to see him that Jerry, after inventing a cock and bull story to account for his return, hadn't the courage to ask for his friends. Dinner time would be early enough. He would see them then.

There are circumstances which demand the dramatic background. This was one of them. He must control himself so as to tell Mr. Ko in Constance's presence if possible, but very calmly, after Mr. Ko's own style, how he had found him out, how he was no longer fool enough to be used by him, how that method was not what an Englishman calls playing the game. By this time he was settled in his room, all his baggage about him. Something inside was teasing him, "How about the Astor House Hotel?"

"Oh, well," he answered, "that was only a fancy. This house is far more conveniently located, and I have always liked it here."

The long dining room, simple in its decorations, unpretentious, was very restful, the Chinese boys were attentive. Something in the very atmosphere of the place was homelike, satisfying.

There was the usual number of Englishmen dining, as he was, alone. They would dine alone night after night. It was a feature of the house—your privacy was respected. The usual number of elderly ladies—he thought of them as "singletons"—also dined each at her own table. He had always assumed that they were the widows of old Shanghai merchants—of more importance and far better off living there on Mexican dollars than they could hope to be at home.

This was his second whiskey and soda, he realized, and he was dawdling along killing time at his simple dinner—but no sight of Constance. Dining at the elegant Ko mansion, doubtless, out on Bubbling Well Road. However, it was but little after eight. He smoked in the lounge just off the dining room, where some Americans were having cordials with their cigarettes. One woman, built like a goddess, gowned as nearly after the same fashion as she dared to go, talked without end of her golf game. It was apparent that her score which was excellent would have been perfect had it not been for the unwarrantable interference of the wind. She was also playing, it must be remembered, on a strange links. One

of the men asked, "Is it proper to say 'A links'? I thought links was plural."

"Yes, you would," the same woman answered. "Doubtless you would think 'sex' is plural also."

"No, I've always thought it was singular," he replied.

Whereupon the other woman, the one with eyeglasses, contributed, "Anything to shut Molly off from bragging about her game, but, speaking of sex, I think our host of last week is the most brazen roué I have ever encountered. Any woman is fair game to our millionaire Celestial. If Molly could have kept off golf long enough to give him a chance, I think she might have owned him."

"I, own him?" exclaimed Molly. "With the Irish eyes driving him insane every time he looked at them? I guess I'll stick to golf. It's a safer game."

Jerry put down his coffee cup and listened for more. These must be the people who made up the house boat party. Why couldn't they go on in their exceedingly frank, American way and tell exactly what were their impressions of Constance and her attitude towards the representative of "The Wealth of Ormus and of Ind."

"You must confess, my dear," said the man who had spoken before, "that he is a perfect host. I never saw such service. It must cost that man over a hundred thousand to live."

"That's not as much as the Pendletons spend," insisted the eyeglasses. "Mary said when she visited New York last winter that we hadn't an idea of Wealth even in Kansas City."

"I don't believe that," the man, hitherto silent, contributed. "I know people in Tulsa who live way beyond the whole Standard Oil outfit."

"You remember when I drove so well off that soft tee at the tenth hole," Molly interjected, switching them back to her own topic.

It was in vain that the quiet man behind the potted palms puffed his cigar and waited. Not another word would they say concerning what he wanted to hear.

When he left the lounge the goddess called Molly was still bragging of her game; the one with the eyeglasses was uttering the obvious with all the pride of a discoverer; the husband of the eyeglasses was having his bit of quiet fun at the expense of the others; and the other man was maintaining against any and all that the most learned and cultivated of the earth's population lived in a section in the middle of the United States of America—alike far distant from the corrupting influences of low prices and Oriental civilization on the one coast, and the outworn dogmas of Europe on the other.

Jerry was beginning to ask himself afresh why he had so hastily returned. He had no intention of shaking his fist in Mr. Ko's face. Surely nothing so crude as that. It would be a bit humiliating to be caught by Constance as one who had come back to spy upon her. So he went to his own room.

Next morning at breakfast he pictured her surprise when she should walk in and find him there. Would

she be pleased? If so he could read it instantly in her eyes. Indifference she would cover up, leaving him in doubt. But she didn't come, though he waited long beyond her usual hour.

So he telephoned to Mr. Ko's house asking for Mrs. Landon. Number One Boy who answered the ring said, "Missy Langdon. My talkee him topside. My go see." Which eventually brought Esther to the instrument.

"This is Jerry Householder," said a voice in her ear. "Are you there?"

"Yes, Jerry. I am here, but where are you?"

"You see it's rather mixed," said the voice. "That is, I've come back, d' you see, to settle one or two things that—that I didn't know about when I left. See here, Esther, do you mind meeting me for a little talk? Is it too early or something?"

"I'd like very much to see you if you can come out here now, right away. You see, Jerry, I'm going back to —back home, and I leave in a couple of hours."

"Right! I'll be there directly."

Ten minutes later he made good his promise. Esther looked tired and, he thought, a trifle afraid, if such an emotion as fear was possible in one so constituted.

"You say you are going home?" he asked. "Nothing wrong, I trust. Peter isn't ill or anything?"

"Poor Peter!" she replied with more feeling than he had known her to exhibit in all these weeks of pleasure away from hin. "Peter hasn't written a word since his

abrupt appearance and disappearance that day in the garden. If he weren't the most patient man since Job he would never put up with my whims, would he?"

"No, I don't believe he would."

"Jerry, you haven't changed a bit,—blunt as ever. Don't you know that common courtesy demands that you disagree when a woman says unpleasant things about herself?"

"When does Mr. Ko get home?" he asked, ignoring this attempt to force a compliment.

"He didn't vouchsafe any information, didn't even tell me where he was going or why—in fact, not being in his confidence I didn't know that she was going with him."

Esther was sitting on the edge of a beautiful blackwood bench. Jerry who stood facing her suddenly felt faint. The bench seemed to sway to and fro and Esther with it. He put out his hand blindly reaching for something to steady him.

His hand caught a chair. He sat down and waited for her to speak again. She seemed not to have noticed that anything was wrong.

Presently he got himself in hand sufficiently to say in a slightly strained voice, "Sorry—I wanted to see him—in fact, you see, it was business that interests him which brought me back. And you say you don't really know where he has gone? Wouldn't his boy know?"

"I have asked," she said, with a little shudder, "and no one knows."

After all, when one has pretty nearly burned the bridges, going back looks dubious. Even Peter Landon had been known to lose his temper.

Esther was too wise to lose sight of the point that if she now went crawling back to Peter unheralded, her return could hardly be welcomed by him without reservations. To be sure she had been as a guest in Mr. Ko's house in need of no chaperone, a married woman whose husband was tied down by his business. The latitude in places like Shanghai, or let us say the absence of cavilling, is well known.

But it is not customary for women to go so far afield as to visit a Chinese gentleman though he be a cosmopolitan, a scholar and the very emblem of Wealth itself. Esther knew this; the knowledge and consciousness of it had more than once made her wince. But sometimes a pretty and attractive woman would rather wince than forever go without.

Youth is not enduring; beauty fades too soon. Opportunity no sooner knocks than it has gone, perhaps never to return.

Esther was keenly aware that shoulders were shrugged, eyebrows raised; that other women looked at each other with that Did-you-ever? question unspoken. Esther had braved it all for Luxury. How short a time it had lasted!

"Jerry," she sighed, for Misery is the loquacious twin sister of Joy, "do you think good old Peter will grouse about my taking so long a vacation? I believe you could explain it all to him so that he'd see the point. A man has

his business. A woman simply sits and thinks till it gets her. Peter ought to have seen that, but he didn't."

Esther little realized how unimportant her affairs looked to Jerry.

With difficulty he pulled his attention round to her question sufficiently to answer her. "Peter—well, you see I never knew Peter very well, did I?"

He would gladly have gone on to say what was in his mind, to the effect that he felt like blessing Peter for his inestimable service in marrying and thus removing from the market a certain girl with whom—but then, such things are never spoken aloud.

Jerry couldn't help, however, philosophizing under cover of silence, upon our dual powers of conversation, for here he was uttering commonplaces about Peter while addressing to himself a conversation that would have been the height of bad manners to express in words. It is fortunate for society that our thoughts cannot be heard.

"You don't have to know Peter. He's that kind. That's the very trait that won me. Don't you know, there are people like that? No long explanations. They see right away—what you see. Other people have to have it explained."

"Quite. There are you. He'll see this also."

"But, don't you see, Jerry dear, that's what I fear. I don't wish him to see too much. What I mean—I don't wish him to see——"

"You don't wish him to see what isn't there. After all, it comes to about that. Now, doesn't it?"

"Precisely. But men are so—so queer," she went on wandering away to what was in her mind as a grievance.

"Why shouldn't they allow us women the same freedom to enjoy ourselves which they take without a word? They forget that women are human."

"I had always thought women in that respect had very much less temptation than men," he countered, "am I wrong?"

"Women are far more particular than men. That's the only difference."

The thought of Ko-Yiang flashed into her mind a red hot accusation which showed instantly in the heightened color of her face and neck. It even smarted in her eyes.

If Jerry saw it he traced it to the wrong source, thought it bore some reference to her refusal of him, so he promptly switched back to Peter: "When are you leaving for home?"

"This afternoon's boat. And as I haven't notified him there'll be no launch there to meet me, so I shall have to hire a fisherman to row me up. It will take me about three days to get home, but now that I've decided to go I couldn't bear to spend another night in this hateful house."

"Hateful?" he repeated. "This is one of the most beautiful houses in all China. I never come here without feeling that it is really a museum. I have never seen such a collection of porcelains. Look at that yellow vase behind you. It's worth a fortune. That color and glaze are a lost art."

"Jerry, you know very well that what makes the house is the people in it. Oh, I'm sick and tired of this life. Hollow mockery—that's what it is. I'm fit for something better than this. One day you're an angel, too beautiful for words; the next, some woman comes dawdling along with Irish eyes, and you are classed with the kitchenware —a cracked saucer, only a step from there to the ash can."

Irish eyes! There it was again. So it was jealousy of Constance more than pity for Peter which drove her homewards.

"Do you really think that she has—what I mean, that it is serious between them? She has lived so long in Korea—quite an unconventional girl. I mean—not the sort to go in for mixed marriages and all that, you know. Seen too much of these foreigners, knows too much about life—don't you think?"

He was the more embarrassed the more he attempted to explain his question.

A minute ago he was too disgusted to consider Constance's offense calmly. Now here he was defending her, explaining to Esther how it simply couldn't be as it looked.

Yet he knew in his heart that she had yielded exactly as Esther had yielded, not to man, not to physical attraction, but to Wealth and the luxury, the comfort, the freedom from care and worry, from poverty and ignominy, the ease that Wealth can buy. No one says much about it in public. It is one of the subjects best left untroubled.

Jerry had always known it, but not such a flagrant case, not mixed with race problems. "All I know is that they have gone somewhere together," Esther explained wearily, "and that they took jolly good care to let no one know where they went."

He got up and said something about having business to look after, must hurry along. Might catch the Empress boat if he looked sharp.

She could see that he was ill at ease. What reckless thing would he do next? She had hoped to coax him into going up the river with her. Peter would be so much easier to handle if Jerry were there to help the explanations. She could enlarge so much upon the society of her old friend as to minimize the effect of Mr. Ko.

Now you could see the old wild look in Jerry's eyes. Horses couldn't drag him away from the particular notion that seized him. She knew him too well to try it.

"Good-by, Jerry dear," she said, taking his hand. Tears were in her eyes, blinding tears that shut out a clear view of his face, scalding tears that welled from the sad knowledge that life was unjust to her, bitter tears that reflected her return from the round of Pleasure to the treadmill of Duty. She was very sorry for herself.

What a changed Jerry—from the ardent handclasp which once used to devour her pretty hand, refusing to release it—to this cold pressure—what a change!

Long afterwards she recalled that look in his eyes. Without a word Jerry was gone.

CHAPTER XXIII

Jerry was gone. Esther was alone. The sense of being alone weighed heavily upon her.

The house boys, attentive, kind as ever, took charge of her belongings—and how those belongings had increased in quantity and in quality since she arrived with scant equipment!

Now she was leaving with many boxes containing an enviable wardrobe, jewels, gold chains, ornaments, a string of jade beads that had seemed fit for a queen until she had seen the necklace given Miss Farley.

Decidedly Esther had gained in her belongings. They that work in gold find gold dust in their hair. It sticks to their clothing. They too would gain from the mere contact with it were it not for the watchfulness of those who employ them. Ko-Yiang when he had been her Ko Ko was not watchful save that she should have the best. So she had gained as it were by attrition all that finery which the boys were carefully carrying away in her boxes.

"Finery, jewels, gowns, ornaments," she went over the list in her mind.

"What value have clothes if there is no one to see, to admire, to envy them! Would any woman be vain enough to dress up if she were alone on a desert island? Would Peter even notice if I should adorn myself in all

this elegance? Peter would frown and ask why I didn't wear something simple and useful."

Nevertheless she took them all. Hadn't she fairly earned them?

At that thought she recoiled. Why had she ever put it in such crude form? It seemed that someone else must be responsible for so horrid a suggestion.

The motor car was at the door, his motor car. He had never given her the Sunbeam runabout promised as a bribe.

A little launch carried her out to the river steamer lying at anchor with a score of others. She gave to each of the house boys when they left her a generous fee. One may be returning to poverty, but one must vanish like a lady. From the deck she could see the bustle, the push, the hurry of life along the Bund.

Someone's wealth had built since the War those fine new business houses.

Children with their amah were waving to someone putting off from the jetty.

The old Palace Hotel, a patchwork of red and white, stood out by reason of its Victorian elegance, a little out of date in its exterior.

The muddy water whirled under the propeller. Already Shanghai was receding. What Shanghai meant was fading into the past. With a deep sigh Esther turned away. She was young. Was it any wonder that she loved life, that she shuddered at the thought of being buried alive!

In the quiet of her cabin she sat on the edge of her bunk to think it all over. First she must get herself into the right frame of mind to meet Peter. A suspicion had by now grown to certainty that she was the one to blame this time. She must therefore keep her temper under control, and—if she hadn't entirely lost her charm she knew just how to cajole him. How many times in the first days together she had won him over! He was like a dog who loved to have his head rubbed.

"Before he gets round to asking disagreeable questions, I'll run my fingers through his hair and kiss him. If only I don't lose my head and say mean things to prevent him from speaking his mind to me!"

The captain at dinner tried to be polite. It was not an unpleasant duty to address a few remarks to so pretty a woman, so well dressed and prosperous a woman.

She replied in monosyllables. The pretty woman was not easy to approach. She was troubled about something. Her eyes told the story.

That night she couldn't sleep. The cabin was stuffy. Fifty times, a hundred times she went over the scenes that had led up to this. The conclusion was always the same: She would start all over again with Peter who was worth the sacrifice, provided, of course, he was not hateful about her little escapade.

Each time at this point it was necessary to review the past few weeks in detail. And in her review the salient points on which she dwelt with the keenest pleasure were those departures from strict conduct which she would have

censured in anyone else. Probably it is partly due to our pride in having broken the rules, that lack of contrition, that glorying in transgression unpunished which is a universal human trait. He who does not know it is in a class by himself.

Esther Landon could not sleep. She gazed out at the darkness through the porthole, and decided that one must live. Ko Ko had treated her shabbily. To be sure, he had been generous financially. He was always liberal with money. It cost him nothing. But he had explicitly promised a reward of another sort for helping him at that time with Constance. Was it her fault if things went wrong, upsetting his designs?

She wanted to feel very indignant towards her rival, was surprised that her jealousy of Constance did not rankle more. The truth was that Esther Landon was a mixture of contradictions; that love of luxury, the desire to dress well—these common failings combined in her with laziness to ruin what without them would have been a strong and lovable character.

This was the conclusion reached by her in summing up her vices and virtues. Doubtless she was not far from the truth. The one transgression, she decided, which she could not forgive that Farley woman was that she had let her down.

So the night passed, and the day and the next night. Getting home had little of thrill and excitement to recommend it. "If he is out when I arrive I'll put a note in the door knob as I've done so many times, and I'll simply

say: 'Vashti, your queen, is within awaiting King Peter' —that will amuse him. Good old Peter. It will be rather good fun to see him at the table feasting his hungry eyes on me. How that used to thrill me! I can feel it now and the way it embarrassed me until I had to beg him to stop."

This was her soliloquy on the third day when, transferred with all her belongings at the last landing stage below her home, she was forced to continue her journey in a fisherman's boat.

It was afternoon. When she caught the first glimpse of the little yellow house the sun was getting low. It was nearly the last week in August. The days were already growing cooler.

Peter had planted two trees to relieve the solitary loneliness of his house. And a clump of bamboo that grows so fast it had already the appearance of a tiny forest towering above the porch from where she looked up at it.

The door was shut. Peter was nowhere in sight—not yet come home from his disastrous mine up the river.

She had written that playful note. It was ready in her handbag. How amazed old Peter would be when he found it. Would he be delighted when he saw that it was not a hoax, that she was really there?

It may have been by contrast with the fisherman but the thought of Peter just then was distinctly pleasing. He could really look almost handsome at times for a man of so little height and presence.

The fisherman was very obliging about carrying up all those heavy boxes. It took some little time to marshal them all on the grass before the door. Esther meantime was hunting for the key. He must have chosen a new hiding place for it. They always had kept it behind the right hand shutter.

"What fun," she exclaimed aloud, "if he should come just now before I get moved in."

The key was nowhere to be found. The fisherman not to be outdone by bars and bolts forced a kitchen window, crawled in and soon had the little kitchen door open to relieve him of his responsibility and his cargo. The man knew but few words of English, she but few of Chinese. Silver he understood so well that he rang each of the two Mexican dollars she paid him against its mate and against a stone before he was satisfied to accept them. He grinned as he said good-by. This homecoming amused him. In another minute he was in his flat boat sculling with the stream.

Esther stood in the open doorway to watch him round the first bend in the river. Not once did he look back at the woman. This was the first time since she had come to China that she would have welcomed such attention. Now she was alone, not a human being in sight and Peter—why, Peter had fallen into bad habits while she was away. Could it be that Peter also hated coming home to an empty house?

The sun was setting. A long way upstream a motor boat was coming. That must be Peter.

The eternal feminine instinct to please, to be attractive, to look her best, impelled Esther to prepare for his coming. The bedroom was in horrible confusion, not a sheet on either bed, a bureau drawer had been hastily turned upside down on the floor; its contents dumped in a pile—collars, shirts, ties.

"Why, this house is a mess!" she exclaimed, irritated to find that Peter had got along so poorly without her. It was inconceivable that the man should have attempted to live there without a servant. A boy can be had for such small wages.

The water in the pitcher looked and smelt as if it had stood there for weeks. Nowhere was there a sign to indicate that the house was really inhabited. However, this once she would try to make the best of it. It had its comical side, this heplessness of the male.

"My first job will be to get one or two decent boys here," she said to the empty walls.

Her voice sounded ghostly, it made her a little afraid of the emptiness all about her. She hurried through the unsatisfactory process of washing her hands and face in ancient rain water, smoothed her hair before her mirror and hurried back to the door before he should arrive.

The little motor boat had passed.

It looked exactly like Peter's boat. Why should he pass the landing? Could it be that he had abandoned his own house, gone to live with that Dutchman a mile below them? Peter had never liked that man—said he wasn't to be trusted. But his wife was reputed to be a good

cook. He might have been so lonely that he would put up with anything rather than this solitude.

"Poor old Peter—I wonder if he comes home to sleep."

This time she whispered it so as not hear the echo of her own voice. To put it into words was more like having someone to talk to.

"What shall I do?" she asked herself. "I cannot get down the river, and there is no road. Oh, what a fool to start off without even sending him word! I just couldn't stay there another day after what happened—and see what I have come back to!"

Her hands clutched tightly a wisp of handkerchief.

"I'm afraid I'm going to cry," she whimpered like a child that had lost its mother.

A board creaked loudly in the room behind her and she screamed, then checked herself for very shame.

"No use to make it tragic," she told herself. "I'm not going to be a silly ass."

There was no one in the room. She could see that plainly enough and boards were always creaking and doing things when the air got cooler. He might come any minute. That might have been another boat. Boats look so much alike.

"I must look for a lamp," she thought. "It is fast growing dark, and I don't even know where things are."

The living room was in worse confusion than the bedroom, but the lamp contained oil. Thank Heaven for that! A few matches lay beside Peter's pipe on the table. That was cheering. He must be living here.

Next to see what food was in the house. That would be in the kitchen cupboard.

"I will make tea and have everything ready for him. That will surprise him more than my return," she almost laughed as she pictured old Peter's look of happy amazement.

The laugh died unborn. Not a crumb in the cupboard. Only a few soiled dishes. The canister was half full of tea. An orange on a plate beside it had rotted until it was a jelly. One more look outside. She would carry the lamp with her, it would be such fun to see him rushing up to see who dared trespass in his house.

"He wouldn't be afraid to rush up either, not he! Not Peter! He may be little, but I never saw the man my Peter was afraid of."

Ugh! It was gruesome out there in the still night. Darkness was coming on very fast.

"In case he should be coming, I'll slip round to the front so that he will see the light."

Close by the side wall not fifty feet from the house stood the yellow coffin of Peter's old Amah.

"How mean I was to quarrel with him about that. I think one of the very first things I do will be to tell him. —My God! What's that—beside Amah's coffin? My God, I must be mad! No! There are two—two coffins there!"

Holding the lamp she stumbled forward to make sure. A second coffin stood beside the old Amah's. A new

coffin—a metal plate on its lid. Her hand shook so that the chimney rattled but the light on that bright new plate revealed a name. Esther's knees shook together as she read:

"Peter Landon—Died August 10, 1923."

Peter was dead, and no one had even been able to tell the date of his birth! And they had placed his coffin out here, Chinese fashion, beside his old Amah! Quite likely he had requested it.

So it all flashed through her mind as she stood there, shaking, quaking with the horror of it, holding the lamp in her trembling hand. Tears fell unheeded on that new coffin plate gleaming in the lamp light, giving back its reflection of the face bent over it. Tears wet the new coffin lid indifferent to the grief of the widow as to all things mortal. Its sole task was to cover the dead. What concern, what care had it for the living?

She who had so soon tired of Peter Landon's company, she who had reviled him as a failure, she who had forsaken him in the chase for pleasure, had left him to die alone, untended—knelt beside his coffin there in the solitude and night, and forgot herself. All that he had been of patient, uncomplaining courage and fidelity came back to overwhelm her kneeling there.

Oh, that he might come back for one brief minute to hear her confession, to forgive the wrong she had done him, the slights, the unkindness, and then—worst of all—did he suspect that she was deliberately unfaithful?

"God forgive me!" she cried again and again.

Did she hope for an answer as she cowered there by the side of what was once Peter Landon?

An owl far off shook the still air with his wailing cry.

The lamp flickered—and went out.

CHAPTER XXIV

To Constance Farley, after her years of life in the East, thoroughly used to Oriental ways, unconventional, indifferent to criticism, it was none the less a very trying experience, travelling with a Chinese.

It may or may not be the best way, but in all the East one sees very little social intercourse between natives and Europeans. Business is one thing; social life quite another and a different thing.

Constance knew when she and Mr. Ko came to the table together that every eye in the saloon was appraising the situation, that after dinner there would be a rush to the purser's office to ascertain exactly what were the facts as to their cabins. Fortune or Mr. Ko's forethought had placed them far apart; that was something!

It was an unusual, an extraordinary sight, she was well aware of that,—an American or English woman coming to the table with a Chinese, even though it was fairly obvious that he was a cultivated gentleman. Social habits are as hard to change as noses, and as plain to see. There isn't necessarily any logic in either and you cannot blow either away. There they are—powder is wasted on them. It is wiser to accept them just as they are.

From Shanghai to Moji is but six hundred miles, two

days, but they were days of torment for the woman who thought she didn't care, was independent of the opinions of strangers. She found that she did care, that this was another matter; not at all the same as eccentricity in dress or how one chose to do her hair.

No fault could be found with Mr. Ko. He understood and was considerate enough to leave her to herself. During the evening he would come and sit by her for a chat. He gave the impression of one who happened to be taking the same journey and was looking out for her.

Mr. Ko was a man of the world. There may have been tricks that were strange to him, delicate touches in the game we call Life of which he was ignorant—Constance would have told you that if such was the case she had not discovered it. A past grand master, this collector, this dilettante, this student of mankind, this emissary of the greatest of all the gods—Mammon.

One night as they sat on deck enjoying the balmy breeze he began once more to speak of her, of her life, what lay before her, what she might be if——

"If what?" she wondered. Something held her back from asking. She seemed to fear a little to know what he meant.

He drew his chair round until he half faced her.

"I can speak better if I can see your eyes," he explained. "I had never before known this: how much one can read in blue eyes—so much more than dark ones."

"Nonsense. The color of anyone's eyes has nothing to

do with it. Look at yours—black as night, but I can read your thoughts in them as clear as print."

"So? Then tell me what is it I am thinking just now?"

She laughed, and leaned a little towards him. The light from a window of the lounge lighted his face.

"You are thinking how vain women are, how easy to turn their heads by a little flattery. You are really not a bit Chinese, are you?"

"You mean that my countrymen do not know sentiment? To be sure, they have not what you call flirtation, they do not kiss, they do not woo. Yes, you are right. To my people the woman is child bearer, she is mother, she is housekeeper—but she is not friend. We are very different. When I go to college in England, I learn many things, this among them, and since in my travel, in my books, everywhere, I see and I take what seems better than my country. What seems to me no better or not so good, this I leave alone."

"I have often thought how wise you are to stick to your own beautiful style of dress. That is so much more picturesque and individual and dignified."

"And appropriate," he added.

"But you have not read aright in my eyes of what I was thinking. Women may be vain, but you are not. It is not of empty things I was thinking but of fullness."

"Fullness?" she asked. "Fullness of what?"

"Of the power to make a man happy," he answered, and the light through the saloon windows revealed a look

in the dark eyes that Constance had never before seen in any eyes. It was a look that told its secret unblushingly, a look that had every reason to blush and hide its head for shame.

Instinctively she was afraid, repelled, disgusted. It showed itself in those telltale blue eyes. Mr. Ko saw it instantly; before she knew that it was there his whole manner had changed. He was smiling now, his brotherly, good natured, indulgent smile, as he continued:

"The power that seeks to make all men happy, to bring the nations together, to give this poor, stupid world a chance to live and let live."

Constance not naturally suspicious, was disarmed. It was the strange, fierce look of the Chinese and Indians which to us is inscrutable. So she explained it to herself. She had been mistaken in that terrible look. That was all.

"You are a strange man," she said aloud. "Sometimes I wonder if I understand you at all."

"The lady is very kind to try," he replied warmly. "There is no one, no one,"—he seemed at a loss for the right expression. His long hands were measuring distances of half a yard, his favorite gesture—"Whom I should so wish to know me very well," he continued. "I feel sure that you would be lenient towards the faults of a man. That you could not quite understand you would overlook. Is it not the heart which counts for most? Cold nature makes the boast that the head governs the heart—huh! For me let it be the heart which governs

always the head. My head makes some times mistakes, my heart never!"

She couldn't see his eyes. He had cleverly withdrawn just out of range of that light from the saloon. The zeal of the collector was leading Ko-Yiang to take risks, which he turned to account by stopping just in time. Was it because this particular specimen was so hard to get that Mr. Ko was willing to take greater risks, to lay deeper snares than he had ever tried before? It seemed to him that she was the most to be desired, the most fascinating woman he had ever met. That slow, deliberate speech, the easy grace of her body, and those deep blue eyes—whichever way he turned he could see them. When, half shut, they laughed at you, daring you to come on—was anything on earth so seductive! He allowed himself to dwell on these thoughts until they haunted his sleep.

Constance Farley was the pearl of great price.

There was one more night, crossing the channel to Fusan. The only other passengers were Japanese. They two stood well aft watching the land as it faded from sight. Soon only the stars gave them light. The water was black. It struck under the ship with a savage thud.

Mr. Ko stood very close beside her. "I should hate to be alone now," he began after a long interval of silence. "It is—I mean it would then be oppressively lonely."

When she did not respond but stood there gazing down into the dark water, he asked:

"Are you never lonely? Is it enough to have one's own thoughts, memories of what has been, hopes for what's yet to come? These are company, but—are these quite satisfying?"

How he craved there, where they two were the only ones that existed, to take her in his arms, to crush her to him, to force her to feel what he felt—this man who had learned European ways, this man whose will was never thwarted, this man who drank life to its dregs, who combined in his strange nature the unfathomable Orient with every refinement of self-indulgence known to the idle rich of Europe.

A Frenchman, an Italian, yes, and a man of any other nationality would have yielded to the temptation or, making an excuse to leave her, would have fled—Mr. Ko did neither, he waited.

The most ardent fisherman having cast his fly, with patience waits for the trout to rise. If today the fish refuses to bite, hunger tomorrow may tempt it to take the bait.

So reasoned Ko-Yiang, expert in many things, in this best of all. The weakness known as pity he had never understood. Was he not rich? Did he not pay lavishly with his great wealth for what he wanted?

Ah, it was an exicting game, the chase! He had always won. This conquest because the hardest was the best of all.

"Yes, I am lonely sometimes," came the slow reply. "Mountains make me lonely—they are so big and im-

movable. It always seems to me that they despise me. The ocean in a storm, that despises us, too. And sometimes I have met people who seemed to look at me as I should look at a dead fly——"

"Ah," he murmured, softly not to frighten the trout, "but if you are with one who sees in you every perfection you could not then feel lonely."

"I don't see just what we are going to accomplish through Sin Chang," she said more abruptly than he had ever heard her speak.

Why should she change to a new topic when they hadn't finished his? They hadn't scratched it. Something had frightened Mr. Ko's fish, just as he had begun to think of the reel and the landing net.

"That is what you will see in a few days," he assured her. The darkness hid the smile of triumph that curled his lip as he went on to explain: "With my backing and guidance your mountaineer pupil may become a prophet to lead his people. The stage is set for just such action. The peoples of the East are reckless, impatient, waiting for they know not what, but ready. Have you not heard the term of angel given to him who supplies the needed moneys to finance the play?

"I am the angel. Others will play the leading parts."

Again as he finished, that unpleasant smile curled his lip. It seemed to sneer at her for believing the words so meaningless, so false.

His voice was earnest; sincerity vibrated in that deep tone, deep, yet not deeper than the man who uttered it.

The woman leaning on the rail felt that she understood, repented if at rare intervals distrust had crept in to shake her confidence in him, and assured him:

"I think it is a noble thing to spend one's money in such a cause. You have never spoken of such things—I like that sort of reticence. Yes, it is well worth the—small sacrifice it costs me. Besides—I am truly grateful for the wonderful presents which I should certainly have refused to accept from anyone—anyone else. Somehow I didn't dare refuse them, because you have a way of making it appear you are not the benefactor but the benefited."

"You please more than I can tell you when you speak like this," he replied.

Ah, at last he was getting on. His eyes fairly glistened with satisfaction. It had been a struggle but he knew the symptoms—gratitude spiced with admiration caused more falls than pride ever heard of.

The artist in him was roused. As an expert he valued most highly the conquest which terminated in cheerful surrender, surrender of the will, that delightful compliance which is more than yielding. To reach this stage had, however, taken so long that he found it almost impossible to curb himself. What would happen now, he wondered, if he should tell her he could hold out no longer against the ache, the longing that was eating out his heart? And then, if he should engulf her in his strong arms and revel in the European indulgence of kisses—for kissing is a habit, which once formed is broken only when there is

none willing to be kissed. He thought these things, still his control of himself was such that he gave no sign of them.

Was she racked by the same desire? he wondered.

Presently she sighed.

"Why do you sigh, dear—lady?" he murmured, for there are questions and answers that even the wind and the sea must not hear.

"Thinking of home," she lied, for it was of him she was thinking, which didn't mean Mr. Ko-Yiang but someone as different from him as gold differs from brass.

"Of home? Home is where we are dwelling. It may be here, it may be there. Only the provincial limit the idea to their birthplace, their parents, their childhood dwelling place—and of all women I have known you are the least provincial."

"Do you mean you think it a weakness to love one's real home?"

"Not a weakness, an error, waste of affection. We are in the earth but a few years. The wise make the home where is most pleasure."

"I doubt if you believe that," she said turning away to watch a belated fishing boat, the lights of which could be seen bobbing like fireflies.

His arms were extended to grasp her. Why wait another day for this elusive creature who would not give you her attention for five consecutive minutes? She must be forced, compelled. Afterwards she would confess that nothing suited her so well.

"Come," she commanded, "let's go in. We've exhausted the delights of peering at the rudder."

"The rudder," he argued, "is far below. You could not possibly see it. Besides, there are no delights in looking at rudders."

Disappointment was making him irritable. This phenomenon, alas, is not confined to the Chinese. She made no reply until they had gone inside, then she faced him smiling:

"You know very well that the rudder is almost as important as the engine. There's really no use in starting if you can't get where you want to go."

"Ah, an allegory," he exclaimed, delighted. Here was a nut to crack. She meant that he should interpret that figure. It certainly had some bearing on the question of their future course together. After she had gone to bed he paced the deck trying to solve it.

CHAPTER XXV

WEALTH was able to stop the Manchuria train steaming north from Taiden towards Seoul—wealth lavishly expended.

Constance looking eagerly from the car window saw the mighty figure of Sin Chang driving two of his bullocks up the steep path to the little stone hut perched aloft on the mountainside as sentinel of the valley.

He had turned to watch the train laboring as it climbed; now, as it slowed preparing to stop, he faced directly about. This was no ordinary passing of the express. Why did it stop at his crossing? Had it anything to do with Mr. Householder?

Since the departure of the Anglish and the Missioner's daughter he had heard nothing either from them or from the Japanese. To be sure, letters awaited his call at Seoul, but he had not made the journey since they left.

Constance, as she stepped from the train, waved to him. How powerful, how noble the giant looked standing there among his hills, his white clothes in such sharp contrast to the dark gray rock behind him. His faithful, black hound was close at his heels. The bullocks, curious also, stood looking back in bovine surprise at anything that

was not food or drink or the man whose heavy hand never spared them.

A moment he stood, until her gesture made him sure; then down he dashed, light of foot as a child, and like a child he danced for joy at sight of the Teacher.

He seized her hands and kissed them. His long, yellow teeth were bared in a perpetual grin. What baggage the travellers had he took from them, carrying it all as one would carry a satchel. And all the time his deep voice rumbled native words of welcome which Constance understood, answering as he would have her answer, in phrases that he loved to hear.

"You too are welcome," came his belated announcement to the great gentleman of China, just as they reached the little plateau before his house.

Mr. Ko-Yiang, who had never countenanced familiarity from inferiors, frowned and made no reply.

Once only the Korean looked at him, a scrutinizing look that was almost a glare. He, Sin Chang, was master here —he bowed to no man, least of all to foreigners. And had not the lordly blond gentleman, the Anglish, treated him as an equal from the very start?

For what should a Chinese millionaire take to himself the manner of a King—to scowl and turn away from him on his own domain? Was not Sin Chang a name known even in Taiden?

The soft voice of his teacher turned his thoughts back to pleasant things.

"I knew we were sure of a welcome," she said, "we

have come to help your country. Later you shall hear all about it."

Mr. Ko frowned and turned his head away. Why should she talk in a language strange to him? The Korean understood English.

"Where is my friend, the Anglish?" asked Sin Chang, looking hard at Mr. Ko as he spoke.

She hesitated; then:

"Mr. Householder has business to look after."

Then after another pause:

"Mr. Ko has a very generous plan which I will explain to you tomorrow."

"A generous plan? So! A generous plan! But Missy shall explain—tomorrow."

The door of the hut opened. Beautiful as ever, lithe as a panther—and as untrustworthy—Yisan stood before them.

She wore the regular peasant costume of coarse white cotton, the skirt voluminous, draped in folds about her, the neck and shoulders likewise covered, the firm, round breasts completely bare, frankly exposed to observation, thus proving that clothing serves two primary purposes: adornment, and to excite curiosity by partial concealment. It may be the eyes thus covered, it may be the back of the hand. The inquisitive mind must have a peep behind the curtain. That is the secret of the show business—what is not shown.

Is it also the secret of Art—that the artist suggests: The imagination of the beholder fills the canvas.

Yisan was beautiful. Constance accustomed for years to the sight of the costume paid no heed to it. Something glowed and burned in Ko-Yiang's eyes, fastening their gaze on Yisan's breast. It was something from which Constance recoiled in horror.

Not so Yisan. A man looked at her with admiration. And the man was a personage. One saw it by his dress.

"Missy has come," rolled the deep bass of her spouse, recalling her to her duties as hostess.

She heard in the announcement only the man's joy that the foreign angel who had taught him, whom he worshipped as a divinity, had come back to bless his humble home with her presence. And Yisan hated her. She also feared her lord and master whose habit it was to punish wrongdoing.

She bowed herself in a deep curtsy to the foreign woman.

When she looked up her alluring smile was all for the Chinese gentleman, the man whose fierce eyes spoke to one's very heart.

"You have work to do," her lord reminded her. "In another hour the sun goes down behind the mountain—supper for the Missy."

"Supper for the gentleman," she corrected to suit herself, at which Constance, highly amused, asked if she might help. This laudable intention Sin Chang cut short with a blunt refusal: "Such work is not for Missy."

That settled it. Both women knew him too well to argue.

Bread, coarse but good—a food Sin Chang had learned to eat—the goat's milk cheese, these formed the staple of the evening meal. The great jug of his own brew was lifted from its cool retreat beneath the floor, a porridge flavored with herbs completed the repast.

The exquisite Mr. Ko ate sparingly; the drink he refused with bad grace, whereupon the host with a laugh remarked to Constance: "Only dainty things, the breast of a small bird, the bottle of choice wine for him who wears such a ring upon his finger."

Constance trembled for fear her accomplished Chinese friend might know enough of Korean to understand the slur.

If these two were to act together for so laudable a purpose as that outlined by Ko-Yiang, they must be friends, at least not enemies.

Yisan lost no opportunity to complicate matters. She also had taken note of the huge sapphire that adorned Mr. Ko's long, slender hand. Her intelligence could rise easily to the appreciation of jewels. She knew the genuine from the counterfeit by the people who wore them. Would a poor man wear a genuine stone—or a rich man a counterfeit?

In jewelry Yisan was on the same plane with cultivated persons of other races.

Sin Chang got down his long pipe, filled it with the

tobacco of his own raising, and blew great clouds of pungent smoke from his capacious lips.

Why didn't Mr. Ko take this favorable time to introduce the object of his visit?

Constance decided that her presence might embarrass him, so she slipped out into the yard behind the house where the bullocks lay breathing the long drawn breath of sleep.

Rising at her first step the huge dog, fit companion of his master, came slowly to meet her, stretching his legs, and yawning as a dog will when roused by an unfamiliar smell.

Yet with a dog's memory he knew her for a friend, and, when he had duly stretched and yawned, came to shove his cold nose into her hand—which is a dog's way of saying: "I'm glad to see you."

Down there in the starlit valley, mighty trees and little bushes seemed to form a level carpet. On the farther side the mountains made a colossal crouching animal, making ready to spring. The light shone through the little back window of the hut.

Constance, listening for the sound of men's voices, heard not a word. Strange creatures men, so simple yet so complex. Why waste all this precious time if he had come here with a settled purpose? That the purpose might not be known to her she never even suspected, waiting there to make it easier for the men.

When his pipe was finished Sin Chang went outside to have a look at his animals. Ooloong, the black dragon,

would give the alarm in case of prowling creatures, but the owner needed to make sure that his fences held, that no venturesome creature had tried to break away.

He found his teacher seated on the flat rock where she had sat night after night with the Englishman. What ill chance could have driven him away to substitute this forbidding, haughty Chinese in his place?

He could find no way to ask her, but he would watch, and the answer would come.

"Missy make the long journey back again," he said, "Sin Chang is very glad Missy has come for some reason Sin Chang does not understand. But when proper time is to explain—Missy will explain."

"One of us, yes. You must understand this is Mr. Ko's plan, not mine."

"So? It is not your plan. It is Chinese millionaire's plan. But you also have come. Sin Chang who waits for the big cat to spring before he shoot—can wait also for the wearer of finger rings."

It was not going to be an easy matter to break down this strong prejudice.

She knew her man, knew the sincerity of his nature, that he was rough, coarse, often cruel. Never to her had the giant been other than docile, humble, utterly trusting and reliable.

Mr. Ko, for some reason unsuspected by her, was bringing out the untamed side of the man's nature, making the task harder if he were to be asked to work under Mr. Ko's lead. That comparison of tiger shooting with handl-

ing Mr. Ko was ominous. She must say something now to dispel that unfortunate prejudice.

"Mr. Householder and I," she declared, "have been seeing Mr. Ko very often in Shanghai. He is a very generous man——"

"Gives much money?" Sin Chang interrupted.

"Yes, much money."

"Is this generous for man who has—" here he spread wide his two mighty arms, indicating vastness—"so much of money to give some to this and to that?"

"Better than being stingy and keeping it all," she retorted.

"You say Mr. Household—he also believe the Chinese good man?"

"I—think so," came reluctantly, for she was not sure that Jerry agreed with her as to Ko-Yiang.

"I think not so, Missy. The Anglish, he strong fine man—could not care so much for that wearer of rings, fine clothes, perfumery. When Mr. Household tell me so I believe." Then, fearing to hurt his beloved Teacher, he added: "Missy understand I believe her, anything Missy say it is so. Missy do not say Mr. Household think that man all right."

"I know what you mean, good friend," she assured him in her gentle way, "but I think we shall be able to show you another side of his nature, something to please you, tomorrow."

That calm, slow way of hers—how was she, who had been born with it, to know its effect on the mountaineer

trained to harsh things, to danger, to a life of struggle? The spirit of the crusader sang in his ears. He was no analyst. But he knew that he would gladly die for that woman!

The teacher knew many things, all things to be found in books. The teacher was wise and good. But with all her wisdom she would never know tigers—and men as he knew them.

The air was getting cold. Silently, with the pupil who knew her, held her in reverence, she went back into the house. How quiet it was. No sound of voices—only far off the sharp bark of a fox.

Sin Chang opened the door. The two figures over by the window sprang apart. Yisan, hurrying out to the little shed, made poor pretence of looking after the comfort of her guest.

Yisan, young and inexperienced, had not learned to act, else had she shown less anxiety about her dress. Mr. Ko, half facing the window, continued looking out at the yard, feigning an interest in bullocks dimly seen sleeping on the ground.

Constance, who had seen all this, fearful of an outburst from Sin Chang, laid a hand on his arm. The powerful muscles tightened, then relaxed. One who didn't know the man would have been deceived into thinking him blind—or indifferent.

Constance long ago had learned the lesson which so many will never learn: that we must take men and women as we find them, useless trying to make them over.

Hadn't she put up with things among the missionaries themselves which were utterly inconsistent with their work, their purpose, their principles?

After all, she held no brief for Mr. Ko. Like other men he was doubtless a mixture of good and evil. If his standards of taste in certain respects differed from ours, they were not necessarily worse than ours.

"He lacks tact," was her final decision just before she fell asleep.

At dawn, hearing footsteps and a muttered curse or two, she looked forth from her window to see the hunter setting out with two bullocks, his pet long rifle, the customary murderous knife in his belt, his black beard and fierce black eyes blacker than ever. Up over the mountain he went, the mighty black hound forming a rear guard.

How the man loved danger, to match his cunning against that of the fiercest animals—his quickness, his courage against theirs. The day was tame without him.

Yisan, who could converse with Mr. Ko only by the universal language of signs, lost no opportunity of letting him know that his masculine charms had won her heart.

All day, ignoring these obvious coquetries, he had tried to induce Constance to go for a walk. He could make no headway under the jealous scrutiny of the persistent Yisan, who never lost sight of him.

Some strange obstinacy, however, had taken possession of the American. She could give no adequate reason for refusing to go, but she refused.

They had come to win Sin Chang's co-operation. Mr. Ko had let his first opportunity slip through his fingers. He had lost ground. She was a little disappointed, a little impatient with him.

At dusk, according to his custom, Sin Chang returned. One of the bullocks carried the skin of a monstrous tiger. It hung down dripping blood, at which the sensitive nostrils of Ooloong quivered. Had he not been near his death when that same keen nose discovered the beast hiding in the bushes?

Constance made the hunter talk of his day's doings, but, though she tried translating it for Mr. Ko, that lover of luxury showed no interest in the tale.

It was after supper, which that evening was a hearty meal of rabbit stew, when Mr. Ko found the opportunity for which he had come.

That night Sin Chang had served them wine from the mountain wild grapes, a heady wine of subtle flavors, flavors that once had been rough, now rendered subtle by long ripening, a wine not unlike some men.

Mr. Ko had drunk freely of it, though without so much as a compliment to the man who had made and served it. He had also urged it upon Constance. "It is not at all strong," he insisted, "delicious taste, but not much alcohol." Constance drank more of it than she realized.

Then, after the meal, while Yisan was busy with her dishes, Sin Chang cut short his smoke to stretch the great skin on a frame out in the yard. Constance and Mr. Ko had lighted cigarettes. Outside it was not too dark

to see the gray lines of trees and the valley looking like a great lake of blackness held in the denser blackness of the mountain range. From behind the house came the fitful gleam of Sin Chang's lantern as he went about his task. Up the thickly wooded slope the tiger's mate lay grieving as near as she had dared to come, such was her respect for the mighty hunter who flashed death.

Her lamentations tore the still night, cursed the cruel executioner, who, if he heard, laughed at her impotence, and terrified the bullocks huddling around the big black dog, their brave defender.

"What a blood curdling howl!" Constance exclaimed, shuddering to hear it repeated.

"Do you think the creature will dare come any nearer?"

"No fear," the man assured her. "This savage hunter would welcome a shot at the mate. He cares no more for a tiger than—well, you must know he also is wild as the tiger."

"A short way down this path," he broke off to explain, "I have found today a seat from which is, even in this light, very beautiful view. It is quite near, quite the other side from your roaring widow up yonder. Come, I will show you. There we can lay our plans—undisturbed—yes, undisturbed."

CHAPTER XXVI

When Jerry Householder left Ko-Yiang's palatial house in Bubbling Well Road after his unsatisfactory interview with Esther Landon, one purpose possessed his mind: he must get away from Shanghai.

He cursed himself for a fool that he had been so precipitate in rushing back with no good reason, no settled plan in his mind.

Once back as far as Nanking Road, his thoughts began to take definite shape. Up to this point as he sped along he had been repeating half aloud: "Donkeys' ears! I might have known better."

But, when he had collided with an attractive French girl who begged his pardon but hadn't caught his remark, he came to himself sufficiently to explain: "Sorry—I've a bad habit of talking to myself." This was getting too close to dotage. He pulled his mind round to consider ways and means.

The *Empress of Australia* was sailing that afternoon for Yokohama on her way to Vancouver. Tiffin aboard of her—he would be just in time. Once more he would shake off the dust of recent experiences, the memory of which was painful and humiliating.

Nothing, nothing on earth should ever again tempt him

to poke his nose into politics. Nothing could break his firm resolve to keep clear of women. In the lobby of the hotel an old friend waylaid him to have a gin and bitters.

"Sorry, no time, old dear!" he fired back as he hurried into the lift.

"Why the sudden haste?" his friend insisted, following him to the door. "Own up, Jerry; if it's a woman, I'll let you off."

"I finished up my business, do you see, unexpectedly, so I'm going to nip off by the *Australia* for Yokohama," Jerry explained.

"Ah! I see, you sly dog, it's nip off for Nippon. But your color tells me there's a woman at the bottom of it."

"Now I wonder," Jerry said to himself, as the crowded tender threaded her way through the big ships anchored down the river.

"I wonder what ever put that idea in his head. Is my face an open book?"

If there was a woman in the case that woman was his old love, Esther. That was clear enough. Too bad about that girl. She was bright, excellent company, when she chose to be. Hadn't married the right sort of man for her temperament.

Yes, if there was a woman, as his friend declared, that woman was Esther—Esther Landon, another man's wife.

It was a short journey on the swift Empress boat. On the thirtieth of August he was back at the Grand

Hotel, back where his friends up there on the Bluff were tried and true. The life might not be so exciting, but neither was it so wearing.

After dinner, as he smoked in the lounge, the usual American tourists were discussing their purchases. Every one had bought something for less than half its actual value.

One man wore in his dress shirt a pair of iron cuff links, ornamented with Fujiyama in brass. He exhibited them with great pride. A shopkeeper had asked ten yen for them. "Not to me, Son," the proud possessor had declared, "and before I came away I'd bought 'em for one yen, fifty."

"What are they made of?" asked the red faced man who wore a collar that would fit a dray horse.

"Why, they're bronze inlaid with gold."

"John," piped the fat lady whom he called Birdie, "how much real American money is one yen, fifty?"

And John, who had that day given her ten yen to spend for anything she liked, answered: "Oh, that all depends on exchange. You wouldn't understand it."

Jerry, forgetting troubles for the moment, decided that the Grand Hotel, Yokohama, was an entertaining place. But he had no intention to remain an idler. The fact that he had property enough to live on should never lead him to waste his life.

His thought flew back to Shizuoka, and his friends in the tea trade. One of the big firms had an office in Yokohama. He might learn there how things were going

in tea, whether it was possible to get back into the only business which he knew. With Jerry thought, decision and action were nearly simultaneous. He hurried at once along the Bund, turned sharply to the left, and he was there. As it happened so was Mr. Westgate who had come from Colombo to pick up a good reliable tea man for one of his company's estates some twenty miles up in the hills above Kandy. The two met. Mr. Westgate was impressed by Jerry Householder's appearance, by his charm of manner, by the straightforward honesty written on his face.

Jerry hadn't thought of tea culture, but he knew that Ceylon had a delightful climate, that the work was varied, and full of interest, that he would have some congenial neighbors. Furthermore, Mr. Westgate assured him he could buy stock in the company when he had assured himself of its soundness as an investment.

It seemed providential, Jerry thought, and signed on for three years. Mr. Westgate, who knew the difficulty in finding the reliable sort, was equally convinced that it was providential.

The news and the articles of agreement were duly dispatched by that afternoon's post, and the two men parted, having agreed to meet next day at noon to talk things over at the Oriental Palace.

That day was the first of September.

As Jerry took his morning bath he thought how the day fitted his mood: clear and cloudless, neither too hot nor too cool—a propitious day, indeed.

Fishermen were putting off in their clean, unpainted boats. The long row of mighty cranes out on the long stone jetty swung to and fro unloading cargo from the waiting ships anchored alongside. Dozens of big liners lay off in the harbor where the sunlight danced along the waves; lighters swarmed about the big ships lightening their load or filling their holds with the products of Japanese labor. At the long concrete pier of the Canadian Pacific he could see the yachtlike hull and yellow funnels of the ship that had brought him. A column of black smoke poured from her; the little blue flag blew from her fore stay; two tug boats had fastened their lines to her bow. They puffed and snorted, important and impatient. The great freighter, *Steel Navigator,* lay just astern of the big *Empress.* Those two hornets must look sharp when they set out to turn her in such a narrow berth.

"Business," Jerry thought as he watched the bustling life of the harbor. "Japan reaching out for her share of the commerce of the world. How fast it grows!"

Heavily loaded drays rumbled by his window, men hauling casks piled high and strapped with green hoops. Bulls, gay in red harness, drew lumber neatly piled and numbered on the ends.

Boys in groups were on their way to school. Dainty little women carried the basket to market, clicking and clacking on their high clogs, hatless, their well anointed hair adorned with bright colored combs.

Coolies trotted nimbly past with jinrickshas carrying

the well-to-do. Motor cars, arrogant and above common rules, blared and trumpeted and sent the pedestrians scurrying to the sides of the narrow road—to give place to the rich.

Women carrying children on their backs, leading older children, with other children yet to come——

Everywhere color, life, beauty.

What Europe calls the Extreme East—the picture book that is Japan.

It seemed to Jerry, after his absence in Korea and China, that he had never so fully appreciated the gentle beauty, the life, the absorbing interest of Yokohama.

Jerry had made a new start. He was about to leave all this for a strange and a different country. That fact may have emphasized the attraction of what he saw, but the beauty and the life were there that bright morning for any one with sight to admire.

After breakfast and a look at the newspaper he strolled along the Bund in the direction of the Oriental, only two blocks away. It still lacked an hour of his appointment, but he was sure to meet friends.

"How things do shift and change in this world. Yesterday I was fearful of degenerating into a loafer. Today I am signed on for a new sort of life in a strange country. One thing I've found out lately. I'm a man's man. Women are not in my line. Never were. I never made a hit with a woman in all my life. Hello, there's

the *Australia* still at her pier. I thought she'd be off before this."

So his thoughts ran, till, looking up as he came in front of the Oriental, he spied a woman on the second floor, a little back from the window. She was gazing out at all that gay life in the harbor. Two boats shoving off from the beach with cheap curios to sell travellers, were racing each other to get there first. There was great splashing and shouting back and forth. The woman who was young and pretty laughed, showing white teeth.

The man who was done with women watched intently from below. At that height—and in the shadow of the room—no one could tell—it was purely imagination—silly at that. Constance wasn't within a thousand miles of Yokohama. Any American or English girl might look like her at that distance. The man who was done with women couldn't get the notion out of his head. There was no warrant for it—just a woman who saw—and laughed.

A tempter's voice whispered in his ear: "That was true of her, you must admit it; she saw where others didn't see—and she was the most sympathetic creature that ever lived."

"Sympathetic!" Jerry answered the tempter.

"Yes, she has the missionary spirit all right. Philandering with that Chinese!"

Whereupon the voice turned upon him: "That's a rotten insinuation! You know better."

The man who was done with women turned in at the door of the hotel to get rid of disturbing memories. If he had made a new start in life it meant turning his back upon the old. Nevertheless he could not keep from his mind the picture of a woman who saw—and laughed.

CHAPTER XXVII

CONSTANCE knew men well enough to understand that Mr. Ko was of the class who cannot be driven, or even hurried. When he chose to act in the matter for which they had come, he would act. No woman could hasten the day or the hour.

Right or wrong, Ko-Yiang had for years been a law unto himself. This plan that he had in his mind for bringing the nations of the East into harmonious co-operation would have seemed visionary were he another and a less positive type of man. Mr. Ko had expressly stated that he should not begrudge a heavy expenditure of money to make it a success.

To be sure he had been extremely vague in the whole matter. He had discouraged any and all questions. He had cautioned her repeatedly to tell no one where they were going, or to drop so much as a hint of their purpose.

"You will understand why when our time has come," he promised her.

"If I know your nature, if I know woman so that I am able to read you, when the time has come and gone you will thank me for all these precautions."

Possibly he was right, he who knew so many things, but she could not understand it.

His present delay had seemed but an arbitrary exhibition of his power, a power which she granted him in the confident hope that the end would justify it. Now, unexpectedly, he seemed ready, even impatient. At last Mr. Ko was ready to act. She followed him fifty yards along the steep path, to where a rough seat had been placed between two pines.

"Are you quite comfortable?" he asked. His voice trembled. His breathing was audible as if he had been running. What possible reason for this when they had not exerted themselves? She didn't like to call attention to it by asking.

For some minutes they smoked in silence. Growing accustomed to the faint starlight, they could make out distant weird shapes, nearer objects grew distinct. They were a part of that vast mountain region. Stone and forest trees, fields in the valley, the mountain stream that leaped in a tiny waterfall beside the hut, the tumbling stream pleasantly heard even now, singing its high treble to the deeper toned song of the wind in the trees.

"Constance," the voice beside her sounded thick, not his usual voice. He had never before called her Constance. "You do not understand what you do to a man —with your blue eyes, your lazy voice, your beautiful body——"

"I don't care to know. It doesn't interest me."

"Oh, here is where you make the mistake. You do not know your own nature. But I—I know it. I will reveal it to you."

"I am not interested to hear about it," she repeated, starting to rise. His tone more than what he said had alarmed her; a vague terror chilled her.

"You must hear," she heard him say, as his long hand closed about hers dragging her back to her seat beside him. "Do you think I have waited all this time to let you go so easily, you the beautiful untaught, you made for love, yet ignorant of its meaning?"

His right hand held hers firmly in her lap. His left arm was about her shoulders, drawing her with brutal insistence towards him until she felt his hot breath on her cheek, looked into the lustful eyes so close to her own, felt the savage pressure of his body and the pounding of his heart against the frightened flutter of her own. She tried to speak, to reason with him. She tried to scream for help.

At the first sound his greedy lips fastened upon hers, smothering her with kisses, the accomplishment he had learned from foreigners and adopted as his own. Only when he wearied of kissing did he release her, covering her mouth with his hand that she might not cry out.

He was beside himself in the triumph of his passion. Every vestige of his culture, the refinement of years spent in study and in travel slipped from him. Behind his hand she muttered words of pitiful entreaty heard by the pitiless.

She threatened; "There are laws protecting women from such as you. Unless you let me go this minute I will publish you to the world for what you are."

He laughed: "For what I am—that is a man who has Elysium in his arms, and will not let it go."

She promised him: "Release me now and I will keep it a secret. I will not tell. I promise you."

"You will not tell," he whispered back, "for when you leave me you will have too much to tell—and you will have learned by then—such secrets." His voice had fallen to so low a whisper that he put his lips to her ear that she might not escape a word. But first he kissed and kissed again the ear that must receive his poisonous words. And then he poured forth all the vileness of his soul, a madman, forcing her to look into the fetid cauldron of his inner self. He paused, still holding her tight in that hideous embrace.

Not like the timid bird held in its captor's hand, panting for fright, uttering its plaintive cheep, but offering no resistance, did Constance yield to her tormentor.

She kicked and struggled, bit the long yellow fingers until they bled, then bit again and found his handkerchief stuffed into her mouth, heard him curse her roundly in a good English curse.

No sooner had he cursed than he had gone back to kisses, protestations of undying love.

She longed to ask if this was what he meant by love —to call him dog, but would not so insult a dog.

She knew that if she were to help herself it must be quickly done. His superior strength was wearing her

down. The struggle and the fear would soon exhaust her so that she could fight no longer. A thousand thoughts, a thousand memories, chased through her mind.

From a point outside, above all this, she could see herself like a woman who in panic tosses her belongings right and left in frantic search for something which she values most.

So she, exhausting every resource of self-defence, using her strength, her teeth, cajoling, entreating, threatening, promising—all alike in vain—sought now in the wild panic of her brain for some new weapon, argument, or trick that possibly might save her.

And inwardly, she vowed an awful oath that when the fiend had worked his will and fled, she would pursue him if it cost her life, until she found him, publish him to all the world for what he was. Then, if the Law refused to deal him such a penalty as he deserved, she herself would kill him—gladly she would see him die ridding the earth of such foul vermin.

Even then it seemed strange to her that she had time for all these thoughts, time to vow that she would follow him—to think of her revenge.

She was fighting less hard by now,—her breath was getting short. Fear and unwonted exertion were telling on her.

Mr. Ko, the expert, Mr. Ko, the collector, was winning. Triumph leered at her in the narrow black eyes. Superiority taunted her in the curl of those lips that had feasted

on hers. A supercilious sneer lifted the thin, straight eyebrows until they formed a V above his nose.

She tried now to save her strength for one final effort. She would watch and when his hand relaxed if only for an instant, all her strength should go out in one imploring cry for help.

"Ah!" he hissed, for his finger was painful where her teeth had bitten to the bone. "You little cat, you spitfire, I shall now make you pay dear for so much temper. Some day you will apologize—you will say: 'I did not know.' Yes, I shall teach you now, now, when you are done with kicking and with biting. When you are too much out of breath to scream. Oh! I can wait. The night is yet young. Cat as you are, your body is beautiful—and you are mine."

Once more, inflamed by his own words, he sought her lips.

Was that heavy breathing just behind her an echo of he fiend's breath, or was it her own?

Was she too losing her reason that she could hear what was only her own crazed imagination?

If that hand over her mouth would fall away for one second she would rend the night with her cry for help.

Once more, and this time quite distinctly, he spoke unutterable things. A twig snapped. Something crashed down on the shoulder of Mr. Ko with such weight and violence that he toppled over almost dragging her with him as he fell. So great was her terror that she forgot to scream—expecting next the savage roar of the dead ti-

ger's mate. She was on her feet. By running for the hut she might yet escape.

One stifled cry, strangled by the fierce clutch upon his throat, and Mr. Ko, the fastidious wearer of rings, the ardent, hitherto successful, collector—Mr. Ko, special agent of Mammon, was lifted high in air, held in the grasp of one who thus had tamed many a refractory bullock.

"Missy," came the deep voice of Sin Chang. "Go back to house; say nothing to Yisan."

Without a word, still too terrified to speak, Constance went back up the path while behind her Sin Chang crashed through the bushes, over a rough stony slide, carrying above his head that burden which kicked and struggled frantically to get free.

A deep ravine cut through by spring freshets fell away, two hundred feet of sheer drop, where Sin Chang stopped, removing from the other's throat that awful, strangling grip.

The elegant Mr. Ko was whimpering. Threat, entreaty, promise, followed each other in breathless agony.

Sin Chang's great yellow teeth showed in an ugly grin. Sin Chang was judge and jury. The prisoner in the hands of the law was proven guilty. Let the Law take its course. Sin Chang had never, save from the Teacher, heard of Pity.

The giant arms flew forward. A body shot out over the chasm, then fell twisting, turning, hurtling, head downwards.

One awful cry came back to the solitary figure standing there alone, one piercing cry of a blackened soul, blackened by self-indulgence—and the valley lay silent, calm in the starlit night, as Sin Chang strode back along the path by which he had come.

CHAPTER XXVIII

It was all over so suddenly—so like most of the great crises in our lives—that Constance was dazed. She had retraced the short steep path to the hut, her knees knocking together at every step.

When she opened the door Yisan had looked up, indifferent when she saw it was not the man who had come. But something in the other woman's face, something of her recent agony, something of her terror, something that she would never outlive, told its own story. Not guilt, not triumph—abject terror stared forth from the woman's eyes. And Yisan was glad.

"A drink, please, anything—I am faint," she gasped sinking into the nearest chair.

Spoken in her native language, Yisan caught every word. "Indeed," she laughed derisively, "you go just far enough to come back on the run. I know your sort. Faint, is it? Well, faint, and may you never——"

So quietly had the door opened a second time that neither woman had heard it. Sin Chang filled its space with his mighty bulk. So calm, unruffled, undisturbed that one would swear that he had seen no excitement for a week.

A table on which Yisan had been at work stood over

the trap door beneath which he kept his jugs. The table flew across the room and crashed against the wall breaking off a leg.

Yisan, who knew that he had heard her, cowered in a far corner dreading the punishment she knew was sure to come.

The jug of wine was lifted out. Tenderly as a woman he held a cup to the teacher's lips, and bade her drink.

The smarting warmth ran down her throat. She could feel it in her blood, giving her courage and a new grip on life.

How could Sin Chang, giant though he were, be so calm, so self-possessed? What had he done with Mr. Ko? Locked him in the bullock's shed? Set him adrift on the mountain—to meet the prowling tiger's mate? Or—did she not fear far worse for him who had used the hospitality of Sin Chang to such an end? Did she not know the fierce anger of the man, that it was fiercer than the wounded tiger, and more dreadful?

"I can never thank you," she murmured.

Sin Chang, embarrassed, shot a meaning glance at his wife crouching in the corner, imploring him with her eyes.

"You slut," he muttered between his teeth and went towards her.

"Oh, please don't," Constance besought him, for she had seen enough of violence. It made her sick to think of more.

That was all. The man came humbly back to sit beside his Teacher.

Yisan, seeing that she had escaped the well deserved punishment, fled while the way was clear.

But she gave no thanks to the guest who had saved her. Had not her man preferred the foreign teacher to his wife? Was the foreign teacher so much above her, then, that Sin Chang would strike or stay his hand to please her?

Sin Chang owned her—but she would cheat him—as she had cheated him before—when the handsome Chinese gentleman came in and Sin Chang snored lying flat on his back.

Sin Chang sat beside the teacher. His immense body had never seemed so enormous. He filled the room.

Neither spoke.

Constance was shudderingly reviewing in her mind the awful strain through which she had passed. Step by step though she had resolved a minute before to keep her thoughts from such awful ground, she lived again each incident, from the first meeting to this climax.

How plainly now she could read the purpose back of every kind attention from Mr. Ko. He had found in her a harder problem than in Esther Landon. That difficulty had but whetted the collector's appetite to possess her.

Yes, it was clear enough in retrospect, so clear that she reproached herself for coming with him on so vague

a mission. But it was to the house of her pupil and friend that he had led her. That was a clever move, for otherwise she would never have come.

And at the end the cool, the self-possessed, the worldly-wise expert had lost his head and—and how much more?

She wondered, but felt it unwise to ask. It might be better that she did not know.

How changed in the twinkling of an eye, that cruel Mr. Ko who laughed at her entreaties, torturing her with all the art known to his fiendish brain,—and that sobbing, blubbering, helpless creature held aloft by the Korean giant like a kitten in the jaws of a tiger.

Where was he now? Did he prowl even now peering in from the darkness through that small, uncurtained window? Was he plotting revenge, he so crafty, so resourceful, against the simple mountaineer who trusted always in his own strength, the relentless thrust with the long knife, or the accuracy of his rifle?

No enemy, man or beast had yet outwitted Sin Chang. He could have met few in his life who were the equals of Ko-Yiang. And Ko-Yiang would never rest until he had crushed the common clod who had dared to raise his hand against him; who had robbed him of what, after weeks of effort, lay within his grasp; who, worst of all, hardest for the proud to bear, had humiliated him, put him on a plane with the lowest outcast of the coolies.

She knew the pride that had suffered such eclipse. She knew the cruelty—had she not ten minutes ago been its

helpless victim! But she did not speak. The quality of the silence forbade speech.

Instead, she fastened her gaze upon the little window all black without, and even as she watched, suspicion grew to certainty in her mind.

Ko-Yiang had met his master. He had paid the penalty that awaits the evil who are apprehended in the perpetration of their crimes. She knew instinctively that to the rough pupil beside her she had come to be a person set apart, sacred. She would not ask. She did not wish to know what had become of Mr. Ko.

In this confidence she went to bed, but it was morning before she slept.

At breakfast though no question was asked, the empty chair that faced her, the wooden plate and blue stone mug unclaimed asked eloquently for the guest who wore a prince's clothes, a haughtier mien, and yet had condescended for his own purposes to use wood and stone ware.

Yisan let her eyes wander from these to the American woman who, despite her slow speech and dawdling manner, had such fascination for all men, from her to Sin Chang eating like a hungry wolf, and then once more to view the empty place and wonder where the man had gone, and why.

Had it aught to do with the woman's fear and faintness of the night before? Why did the others sit there silent —had they also quarreled?

For this she felt little interest. The mighty hunter whose she was, had no charm for her. The foreign woman might have him and welcome. Yisan was puzzled, and puzzled all the more when Constance having finished her porridge and goat's milk, said to Sin Chang:

"And now, my very dear friend, how am I to get back to Taiden? I am done with the East. As soon as I can get passage I shall go back to my own country, to the people whom I know, whom I can understand."

"Does not the missioner's daughter know Sin Chang?" the deep voice rumbled, reverting to his original manner with her.

"Bless your heart, yes," came the fervent answer. "And never, at home or in foreign land, have I known a better, truer friend."

She put out her hand and caught his, enclosing two fingers in her grasp. He raised his great head from the bowl before him to look into the blue depths behind which dwelt the Teacher's soul.

Two great tears fell upon the woman's hand.

Yisan who had seen all, heard all, was bewildered. So few words had been spoken. Neither had mentioned the handsome Chinese gentleman.

The American had said she would go home to her own country. It must be that Sin Chang cared very much indeed for the American woman. She was to him as a goddess whom one worships with prayers on bamboo sticks or the long paper streamers that keep sickness from the door.

"But ten miles down the valley," the big man said, "is a car that stands upon the siding. It is loaded with skins for this day's train to pick up and carry on to Fusan. Thither I will conduct you, but already is no time to be lost."

Yisan watched them down the steep path, down through the winding valley until a turn carried the pair riding black bullocks out of her sight.

Beside her stood the resolute Ooloong, her protector in his master's absence.

The picture of the two, so wild, so dark, so graceful standing there, so much alike; Constance would carry vividly this picture in her memory for many a day to come.

There was no farewell from Sin Chang. She had known how that would be.

From the rear platform of her train she watched the towering figure, the little bullocks waiting patiently to be turned towards home. The little shed that served for station grew indistinct, blended with the trees, was gone.

Only the great white figure remained, motionless, watching the little smoke cloud and the vanishing dot beneath it. Eye to eye, despite the growing distance, till neither could say, "It is gone." Such had their strange friendship been from the first. Such it would be when they should meet again.

Her thoughts were company enough on the journey. If Mr. Ko had really met his death at Sin Chang's hands she was glad that she knew nothing of it. And, if as would be almost certain, should so wealthy a man dis-

appear, investigation should lead to Sin Chang and to her, —she was firmly resolved that no such interview as hers with Ko-Yiang had ever taken place.

To tell of it could do no good to anyone. It had, therefore, never been.

After supper, when their host had gone to the yard to dress the tiger's skin, Mr. Ko had sauntered down the path towards the gully. He had sauntered down, and next morning she had left.

There had been no argument, no quarrel, no difference with Sin Chang. They were his guests, and he a generous host.

She had it all reviewed a dozen times. If there should be any suspicion of foul play—she was on the spot, and had seen no possible suggestion of foul play. She shuddered as she thought, if Mr. Ko had really met his death, how fair it was, how far from what actual justice could call foul play.

With so much to think of and to plan, the journey to Yokohama seemed short.

She got a room at the Oriental Palace. It struck her suddenly, after she got settled in her room, that she was now utterly alone. She hadn't a friend, an acquaintance in that city. She was going home to a land where she had neither kith nor kin.

It was mid-forenoon. From her window she could see the peaceful ships at anchor. There was one of the big Canadian-Pacific boats at the pier getting ready to

sail at once. Jinrickshas from the Grand Hotel trotted by with passengers.

That woman must have all her baggage with her!

A knock at the door startled her. The boy had brought a card, and explained:

"Missy down waiting in lobby."

He sucked in his breath with a hissing sound as she read the card:

"Mrs. Peter Landon"—The "Mrs. Peter" had been crossed out and "Esther" written over them.

She had barely time, while the boy went to fetch her visitor, to collect her thoughts, to decide how much to tell, how much to omit.

Esther, beautifully dressed, in one of the many costumes contributed by Mr. Ko, looked ill. She was pale, her lips were white, great dark crescents disfigured her below the eyes.

Tense with repressed emotion she was the first to speak: "I saw your name on the register—Have you heard? About Peter? No? Well, I'm crushed, heartbroken. Everyone will say it was all my fault—and I suppose they are right."

Then she poured forth the shocking story of her journey home, her discovery of Peter's coffin; her hastily formed plan, as she expressed it, to go crawling back home where she wasn't wanted.

"My dear," she added in confidence, "I have written to Ko Ko at Shanghai telling him—everything. I thought

it would hardly be fair to rush off until he had had a chance to—well, you see, poor Peter's affairs were in an awful mess, and a man with his influence might get something out of them. I couldn't. Those people at the mine told me there was nothing to get. So I wrote—Where did you leave Mr. Ko? I thought you went with him."

"Started with him," Constance corrected her, "but when I found that he had no settled plan for helping my beloved Korea, that he was merely intending to—to try things, I left him, and came directly here."

This seemed to satisfy Esther as an explanation. She only asked: "And did he go back to Shanghai?"

To which Constance could truthfully answer:

"I don't know. I didn't ask him."

"I didn't put on black," Esther vouchsafed after a pause. "How could I with loads of beautiful clothes in colors, and you know how quickly things get out of style. Poor old Peter never cared tuppence about mourning anyway—but—when I saw that coffin—that he was dead, dead and buried—or almost. Of course, that putting the coffin above the ground is the same thing."

Here Esther genuinely broke down and cried.

Constance looked on in sympathetic silence, knowing nothing to say that would not sound banal. She liked Esther better in this sorrowing mood. She seemed more human, less a spoiled child, for she was crying, and she was repentant as far as repentance was possible for so selfish a woman.

"It's the first time," dabbing her eyes with a moist wisp of handkerchief, "the first time I've been able to speak to a real person about it— Poor Peter!"

Here a flood of tears, and sobs that shook her.

Constance who had once longed to tell her what she thought of her, was moved to pity:

"I'm very sorry, I think I know what you are suffering."

Esther ceased crying to look into the other's eyes. One might mean so much by that last statement. Satisfied that Constance was not sarcastic she melted still further:

"If only I hadn't been so mean that afternoon when he came on us suddenly in the Garden at Shanghai. Oh! and you were nice to him. You brought him along and acted as if—as if you really liked him."

"But I really did like him. I've always liked that gentle, patient, self-sacrificing sort. They are so rare. And so quick to see everything."

"Yes, he was all that," his widow testified, "and I was selfish, and that makes people cruel. Oh, if I could only tell him I didn't mean it!"

"And Jerry," Esther asked, "did he go back home or is he still in Shanghai?"

"I don't know. He just disappeared."

"Well, I'll write both places today. You know, Jerry and I were—rather thick—a long way back."

"He told me he wanted to marry you."

Esther nodded and looked pleased.

"A man could hardly go beyond that to show what's in his mind," Constance said helping the other. It was a little early for the widow to begin counting her chances, but many have done the same.

"I should have taken him then," Esther said, still crying a little, for emotions demand a vent. "Do you think he still—what I mean—do you think he is interested in me now?"

Constance nodded assent, but was somewhat taken aback at Esther's:

"I have always thought so."

Satisfied with this reply she rose to go.

"I hope you don't think me heartless talking this way. Really, I'm not heartless—I feel as deeply as any woman would who had been thoughtless about a dear, good man. When I talk about—other things I'm only saying what a more careful woman would think but be too cowardly to express in words. Good-by, dear. My friends on the Bluff expect me at— Good Heavens, what is that?"

The room in which they stood was rocking to and fro like a small boat in an angry sea. With both hands Esther seized Constance Farley, clinging to her arm, a child hugging her protector. The floor beneath their feet bent and cracked with a loud splitting sound. The walls were tottering. Louder sounds drowned out the warning shouts heard from the street.

The two women swayed in each other's arms, swayed with the rocking of the house.

The noise inside and out had become a frightful roar.

Bright day had gone. It was night; dark, awful night. The air was filled with choking dust.

One crash more awful than the last, and they were falling, falling with floors and plastered walls, falling with the world which was going down in horror and in darkness.

Falling,—darkness,—oblivion.

CHAPTER XXIX

It was always cool and shady, a comfortable place to wait, in the lobby of the Oriental Palace where the rooms above from two stories opened upon galleries, all the centre open to the roof.

Jerry picked up the Kobe Chronicle for news of sailing dates. His friend Westgate hadn't yet arrived. A few men and women, idle like himself, were reading or writing letters to friends at home, letters full of rhapsody, letters expressed in superlative adjectives, the word "wonderful" being brutally overworked, the promise ending each letter: "I will tell you all about it when we meet."

Jerry smiled as he pictured to himself exactly what those letters contained. As for the promise to tell, he knew that it would never be fulfilled because people at home are bored to death with descriptions of sights and scenes. But the letters were being written, the writers chuckling, as they read them over, to think how the friends at home would enjoy those "I wish you could see" descriptions.

How little Jerry or the writers realized that not one of those letters so fervently indited would ever be read by anyone!

"Hello, Mr. Householder, I hope I've not kept you waiting." It was Westgate, ten minutes ahead of time.

The two men chatted awhile of the new business relation, then Jerry suggested adjournment to the bar to baptize the newborn with due ceremony and oblation.

Both were agreed that whiskey and soda was the appropriate medium.

The bar boy set forth his best bottle and two tumblers. He uncorked with a pop a bottle of soda and was in the act of placing it before the two Englishmen when the place—the floor on which he stood—rose up swaying violently. The big electric fan came crashing from the ceiling within a foot of the bar.

The whole ceiling followed it, the walls seemed to open outwards.

"Earthquake!" Jerry shouted, but couldn't hear his own voice for the din, the splitting, cracking, crashing roar that filled the long room, that repeated itself from every angle, that thundered from outside, that came half-smothered from a distance.

All this was so sudden that they could not flee, could only say "which way?" and all the house was down about their heads.

Jerry, quick to act, had raised a heavy, leather covered chair over his head to protect him. Just in time, for in a second he was down, pinned by great, broken beams, by floors and roof heaped high above the strong covering of the upturned chair which formed a tent over his head and chest.

A fearful weight was on his legs, he was smothering in dust.

Why was it so dark? A moment ago the room had been bright with noonday sunlight. Now it was black as midnight. He struggled to get up, but his left arm was useless, it had no feeling, the fingers were numb.

With all his strength he kicked, writhed and twisted, wriggled until his head and shoulders came clear of the heavy chair above them.

Then he sat up. Things were still dropping all about him.

A long way off he could see a gleam of light through an opening the size of a half crown.

"Where was I? Oh, yes, that must be the window."

He got to his feet, keeping that light in sight, and stumbled towards it, tripping, clambering, lurching over what lay in the darkness.

Voices were calling. Cries for help came up from his very feet. Someone shouted in Japanese:

"Monsieur Cotte! Cotte San! Tell where is it you have fallen!"

A woman's voice, an Englishwoman's besought someone to lift this from her.

A man called upon his God to save him.

Smoke came filtering through the dust, the pungent, acrid smoke of burning wood.

He had gained the little opening whence came the light. It was the window that opened from the bar into Water

Street, a large window, the sash all gone, and narrow Water Street was filled with masonry and débris.

A figure crawled beside him on its hands and knees, begging for help. The voice was Westgate's. Jerry stooped and with his right arm helped the man to rise.

"Come on," he shouted, "through the window here."

Westgate was badly hurt, but Jerry tugged and putting his heart into it got through, still dragging his friend by the hand. Westgate was now half out. Again the whole earth rocked, the upper half of the window frame came down throwing Jerry face forward on the wreckage in the street, but not before he had seen poor Westgate cut in two by the falling mass.

Almost stunned as he was, Jerry Householder was at his best in any emergency. The wild man knew only the present crisis wherein his mind worked quickly with but one end in view, not self-preservation only, but the impulse to save life.

Westgate was gone. What of these cries for help, these moaning, piteous cries of women?

And now arose the roar of a typhoon that caught up the dust clouds to send them whirling on, bringing other, denser clouds to fill their place; that howled, until it drowned the lesser cries of men, that shrieked like all the furies through the narrow streets and shattered buildings; that fanned the flames started in a thousand places at once converting the city into one vast, seething furnace. Once when the wind, lifting for an instant the curtain

of night, revealed a fragment of the awful scene, Jerry made out, not fifty feet away, a man who struggled to drag free someone whose hands he held.

Jerry knew the man. He and his pretty blonde wife had come with him on the *Australia* from Shanghai. He jumped, eager to lend the only useful hand he had.

"For God's sake," panted the husband, his forehead black and dripping beads of sweat.

"If you could move this from my chest," the woman from underneath the pile of wreckage directed, whereupon Jerry, putting all his strength into it lifted, pried, pulled and tried to lift again, but could not so much as stir the awful load that pinned her down.

The fire by now was burning furiously all about them, the heat had become unbearable. Two men came hurrying, stumbling, to where the husband stood, still fighting, adding to his own efforts a heart-rending supplication to his God, his Heavenly Father, that He who ruled the Universe would send them help!

The two friends tore his hands from those he held and would have held till death had taken the husband with the wife.

The poor man fought them off until they overpowered and dragged him away.

"Why throw away another life?" they said—and Jerry saw that even now the wretched man was singed, his eyebrows gone, his hair already smoking.

Those pitiful hands still outstretched, still pleaded for help.

Jerry took them in his own. She might not know in so faint a light.

From under the wreckage came a faint voice:

"Go, John, for my sake—Go!"

He squeezed her hands in his, and she, quite satisfied, returned the pressure, then let him go.

No one would ever know, no one suspect this final gallantry that gave to the dying woman the sure consolation that she it was who forced her John to leave her.

Then Jerry ran, ran for his very life, through sheets of flame and blinding smoke, over prostrate bodies that clutched at his ankles, that uttered awful wails, the piteous wails of those whose doom it is to burn to death.

He came out by the canal hoping to save himself by jumping in. The sight that met his eyes was more than he could bear, more horrible, because the light was better here, than the horrors that he had left behind. Thousands who had sought protection in the narrow stream were cooked alive, the water almost boiling, already choked with the bodies of the dead.

Again he fled, now half crazed by the sight of suffering, the sounds of agony added to his own exhaustion and the pain that scorched his eyes.

As he ran along the Bund, or what had been the Bund, the ground beneath his feet shook, heaved in great waves like the sea in storm. Several times he fell headlong, and once the earth opened in a fearful chasm, swallowing a little group who ran just before him—opened and then closed again.

Surely anything so monstrous as this must be a hideous dream. No, the pain in his burnt eyes told him a dream could never equal this.

Over great heaps and piles of wreck he climbed and jumped, his one hope lying now in the *Australia* riding there at her dock. A bull, half crushed beneath a piece of brick wall, kicked and bellowed, and lay still. A little child, a doll-like Japanese, reached up and seized his hand, the left, that hung half helpless at his side. The feeling had come back in his fingers. He had forgotten how he gave it to John's wife when it came back to life as she went out of it.

The little child and Jerry Householder stumbling slowly together went towards the dock until a woman—it might have been the child's mother—took it from him.

He was on the long concrete pier, a cracked, broken, distorted pier, its sheds burning, the ships beside it making frantic efforts to get clear. To reach the *Australia* was impossible. He jumped aboard the nearest lighter, but almost as he gained her the fire had seized her and she was burning. So onto the next and the next he leaped until the flames had reached this also.

The sea was now his only hope. A little launch came puffing by. He dived overboard just in time to catch her rail. Everything was blurred, and through the dust and smoke all details were lost.

A Japanese hauled him aboard. He lay limp in the bottom of the boat—only five minutes of respite—then they landed him on a beach.

He looked about him, the water was filled with men and women standing up to their necks in the sea. But Jerry Householder and inaction were strangers. Scrambling over the Bund he found himself where he had started, directly in front of the Oriental Palace. On the Water Street side the wreck of the hotel was a blazing mass of fire. On the farther side it was just beginning to burn.

Natives were coming by thousands seeking the water front, driven by miles of burning houses, the holocaust from which those who lingered found no possible escape. Each time the earth shook afresh new seams would open, tumbling the burning masses as a giant tosses firebrands with a fork.

The air was filled with sparks, with blazing embers borne on the mighty, rushing wind, and every minute the place grew hotter, till it seemed the world had spun into its final dissolution. Despite the smoke and dust, the fire gave such bright light that he could see his way far better than at first, could see a hundred bodies all about him, writhing in the agony of frightful wounds, some burned and black, still others motionless—dead.

Those flocking from the city no longer carried their treasures in their arms, enough for them if they could save their children and themselves.

He saw a baby on its mother's back burst into flame and sprang to save the two by wrapping them in his coat. Before he reached them both were beyond help.

Something, some vague feeling that friends might still be there, drove him once more to the ruins of the hotel.

The front wall, broken into big fragments of masonry, had fallen out, directly across the Bund, leaving comparatively clear the large dining room.

Up from the go-down beneath this room, a man's head appeared, the grizzled head of the old head waiter who for years had served the house so well that every guest remembered him, as Jerry did. The man, half dazed, was trying to climb out before the heat and smoke should stifle him.

Jerry's strong arms pulled him up, set his face towards the sea, and then had other work to do, work that needed courage, quickness, for the fire was coming fiercer every minute.

When Jerry stooped to lift the old man from his shelter, the firelight showed, blackened, soiled, half buried in the débris, a woman's skirt, soft China silk, striped in blue and white and brown; an unusual pattern, one that he had seen and would never forget—for Constance Farley wore it the last time he had seen her in Shanghai.

A woman wore it now, or what had been a woman, her head and shoulders buried in the dirt and wreckage, a girder across her chest, so long and deep a girder that when Jerry tried to move it he thought once more of that woman left to burn, to burn as hundreds of others even now were burning all about him.

And now, as then, the fire was racing to defeat him. The woman was dead, but he must at least uncover her face to see if by any chance,—on his hands and knees he tore madly at the loose mass that covered the head.

Splintered boards, fragments of plastered wall, the dirt of broken floors—could he never see that face! His eyes smarted and burned in their sockets.

There it was at last! There were shouts and cries for help, the screams of those who burned, piteous wails that grew fainter as other cries drowned them, and the steady roar of fire in the wind never ceasing, relentless as death itself. But Jerry heard none of it.

There on his knees in all that wreck, the fire now so close that his own life seemed thrown away by staying, he held the woman's head in his two hands, and kissed her lips.

Tears from his hot aching eyes ran down his face, leaving their trace of white on his blackened cheeks. He spoke her name, "Constance," again and again, unconscious that in all that din a shout would not be heard.

Great firebrands were falling in a shower, but what were fires or death to him who in so short a space had been through Hell and found it nothing, nothing beside Remorse!

CHAPTER XXX

After that awful fall into oblivion, how long after neither knew, the two women found themselves side by side in a heap of broken beams and splintered boards. It was dark. What little air they had was suffocating with dust and heat.

Esther raised herself on one elbow, then sat up. She kicked away something that held her feet, kicked with the desperation of panic, was free, stood up, and began to scramble to where voices were shouting: "The sea, the sea, this way!"

Then her companion's voice checked her: "I cannot get up—something across my chest is holding me."

"Kick," Esther called back. "Something held me, but I kicked it out of the way."

"My legs are free," came the answer, "but this is heavy—across my chest—perhaps you could move it."

"I'll send back help," Esther promised, hurrying on towards safety.

A little while and help would come, Constance reasoned, lying still to save her strength. A little while, a longer while, and no help came. Only the crackling and the roar of fire coming nearer and nearer. She struggled now with every ounce of strength she had, writhed and

twisted, pushed and tugged at that huge weight that held her fast. If she could only feel it move; if something could be made to stir she could have hope. As well push against a granite cliff.

Then she called "Help!" and waited for an answering voice. Voices were not far off, but none gave heed to hers. Meantime at each fresh shaking of the earth the pile in which she lay grew deeper.

And now the fire had come so near that she could see the shattered walls and people moving not far off. She gathered all her force and sent it out in one great scream, one agonizing cry. The only answer was a trembling of the mass of which she was a part, such rocking to and fro that heaps of dirt seemed emptied from the sky to fall upon her. It filled her mouth, stopping a cry half born. It shut her eyes. The light was gone. She hoped that Death would not be slow, but merciful and sudden. And as she dared to hope—she knew no more.

Lying thus, Jerry Householder had found the body, recognized it by the fluttering skirt. He could not leave it there to burn. The thought was intolerable. On his knees he began clawing at the débris with both hands. Directly under her it gave a little; bit by bit it fell into some hole that was below. The go-down from which he had helped the old head waiter. That must be just beneath this heap. With that discovery came new courage. If he could only dislodge enough before the fire came! Slowly, inch by inch, the head and shoulders were dropping away from that hopelessly immovable girder.

The fire was burning now so near that Jerry's clothes gave out a sickening smoke. His face was blistering as he drew her back, feet foremost, underneath the beam, out from the tangled wreck. Gathering her body in his arms, he staggered through death and ruins—in the panic stricken crowd that crossed the Bund.

There was hardly room enough to stand, so thick was the crowd that filled the beach.

Jerry, with that inert form hanging over his shoulder, waded out until the water reached his neck.

His whole body was one smarting wound. His eyes were hot balls of fire, but he could see the sheets of flame that lit the harbor from the blazing oil floating down from the huge oil tanks. He could watch half the night long with countless others to ward off the flying embers.

Out in the water the woman's body floated; he held it in one arm as one would carry a child. So the long night wore on in ceaseless vigil, but to sights and sounds, to horrors such as he had never dreamed, he was both blind and deaf.

Twice he must have fainted, for he plunged forward still clutching his precious burden, and would have drowned but for the kindly help of those beside him, pitiful towards the foreigner so careful of his dead.

At last, worn out towards midnight he was dimly conscious of English voices, gentle, welcome voices. Some one took his burden from him—seemed to be lifting him also from the water.

He remembered saying "Drink," for it was twelve hours

since the first devastating quake and not a drop of water in all that time.

Some kind hand held a glass to his parched lips and he drank. Then every sense went out.

"This one is badly burned. We think his eyes are gone." It was a strange man's voice. Jerry tried to open his eyes to prove that the voice was wrong if it spoke of him. His eyes refused to open. All was blank before him. Before he could speak the sound of footsteps leaving sounded on a wooden floor. He put out his hand. He was lying on a wooden floor.

But what had happened? Where was he? The Grand Hotel?

Little by little it filtered back through his exhausted brain, the sudden sharp disaster, the darkness, fire—fatigue, anguish of mind, intolerable thirst. And last came the remembrance of that body half buried in the dirt!

Footsteps again. This time he called out: "Where am I, please? I cannot see. Is it night?"

A woman's voice answered, a tired but sympathetic voice, "It is five o'clock in the afternoon and you are on 'A' deck of the *Australia*."

"Afternoon? But I cannot see, not even the daylight."

"Lie quiet, please, and I'll get Captain Robinson directly. He's close by."

Then the captain's reassuring voice: "Can I do anything for you, man? Are you in pain?"

"Not pain now, but darkness. Do you know me, Captain—Jerry Householder?"

"Householder? Right! You've crossed three times with me. We must do something for this man better than the bare deck."

Jerry again put out his hand to verify this statement and touched someone lying close beside him.

"We are crowded with refugees," the captain explained. "You remember we had a full list of passengers. After the worst of the quake was over we sent out every one of the boats to pick up refugees."

"Your crew must have worked——"

"Not only the crew, my dear man; our stewards, every man aboard including no end of passengers volunteered and worked all night. They brought in twenty-four hundred, of whom less than one third are Europeans. More than two thirds are Chinese and Japanese."

Troubled as he was because of the darkness, Jerry couldn't fail to notice the brave captain's characteristic modesty and reticence concerning his own, the leading part.

"And now," he asked, "are we still in the harbor?"

"Thanks to the courage of a Dutch captain we are—Ah! here is a drink of water for you. Our supply will hardly hold out for another four days with so many aboard." Some one raised his head to give him a drink.

"Thanks, very much," he said. "Is the captain there?"

"Right here," the captain answered.

"Then do go on, please, about the brave Dutchman." Jerry was fighting off all thought of his own darkness.

"Well, you may recall that the freighter, *Steel Navig-*

ator, was directly astern of us. The first shake was so violent, as I stood on the bridge, I saw the land coming towards us in waves eight feet high. Next, the sea rose, like a storm and we were dashed up against the pier and one of our propellers was fouled by the *Steel Navigator's* anchor chains.

"In that plight we couldn't move. We must have caught fire from the burning dock sheds but for the brave Captain of a Dutch ship. She was loaded with high explosives, but he didn't stop to think of the danger. He towed us out into the stream."

"Fine work," Jerry exclaimed. "My God, a real man!"

"Here's the doctor," said the same, gentle woman's voice.

"Doctor," Jerry said, turning his head toward the sound, "you are overworked. Just let me lie." He was afraid of what the doctor might discover.

The doctor and Captain Robinson exchanged a glance that spoke in definite terms.

The man lying before them was swathed in bandages, his hair almost all burned off. Far worse—for the burns were not serious—they would heal—the first examination had indicated complete loss of sight.

"It is Sunday afternoon," the doctor said, "I think we've neglected you long enough. I'll just have a look at these blisters"—and with skilful fingers he began undoing the bandages.

"The last I remember," Jerry began, then stopped short. What right had he to inflict his own troubles, his anxiety

for the beloved dead at such a time as this! Was it not enough, more than enough, to give one's thought and effort to the living?

No, he would keep his grief to himself. Her body, so carefully guarded for hours in the darkness of day and night, had been washed away when his strength had failed. At least, it hadn't been left there to burn in a heap of rubbish.

CHAPTER XXXI

"It's wonderful what a cup of tea does for you." This sentiment Jerry uttered with conviction and no little gratitude, after a meagre repast eaten with such ravenous appetite that the doctor remarked:

"There can't be much wrong with a man who eats like that."

Only ten minutes before Jerry had made the discovery that his head was bandaged. This, then, might possibly account for his total darkness.

Of course he couldn't open his eyes with bandages over them, and of course he couldn't even see the light. Steady on! He might not be blind. A man mustn't lose his nerve in any case. Think of all the fellows he had seen in the war, crippled, shot to pieces, blinded—who had kept their heads up, held on. That's pluck, good British pluck! Thus had he reasoned with himself, and thus had he been right in ascribing much of his better feeling to a cup of tea.

How he had slept! Gradually it had come back to him, that Hell through which he had passed. It was Saturday at noon when he met poor old Westgate at the Oriental Palace—Saturday noon!

So all that Inferno was in the afternoon and evening —though it had been as dark as midnight.

And now someone had said it was late Sunday afternoon. No wonder he felt rested, was anxious to be up. He must have slept twelve hours at least. Constance! How suddenly it had come—that knowledge that all along he had loved her!

It was the pattern of that skirt, her skirt, that had caught his eyes, but it went back of that.

The woman up in the window looking across the harbor, too far back in the room for him to recognize her. Hadn't he been startled at the time by her resemblance to Constance? Wasn't that at the back of his mind when, after saving himself, he went straight back there looking—well looking in case any one—yes! It was all plain enough. Something had impelled him.

That something was love, such love as he hadn't suspected until, uncovering that face, he had found it Constance. How petty his jealousy now that he saw it in its true light!

Suspicion had led him to be cruel and cold at the very moment when she had needed him most. What if he had trusted her, had shown his trust that day when he had turned his back upon her. Instead of going with Mr. Ko she would have come to him with the story of Mr. Ko's fanciful scheme. He also might have been deceived but that didn't much matter. Mr. Ko had misled her. Never, never in the world would Constance Farley have gone with him anywhere for the pleasure of his company. That

he could have bought her, as he had bought Esther, was alike inconceivable.

And in face of such patent facts—he, Jerry Householder, had been governed, not by his admiration or his love, but by that base emotion which dominates the tomcat, which causes the male of animals to seek the death of all other males. He might have saved her. He had stood by, letting her go to her death. It was all so clear now that she was gone. It had seemed so suspicious, so murky at the time.

He had been worrying about his sight. The thought of helpless blindness, the fear of it, the almost sure conviction of it, had brought great beads of perspiration to his forehead. Now he wondered why he had given a thought to anything so trivial. What mattered it whether Jerry Householder could see or not? Those Irish eyes, as Esther had called them, Constance's eyes, were closed forever in death.

As soon as might be, without embarrassment to these kind friends on the *Australia,* he would step overboard and end it all. No one would suspect suicide, but better suicide than darkness, dependence, despair.

Strength had come back to him. He sat up unsupported, would have got upon his feet but for the knowledge that others were all about him on the deck.

So he sat, hugging his knees, waiting for what might come, caring little what it might be—for she was gone, and there could be nothing worth while in life for the man who had deliberately turned his back to Opportunity.

To the murmur of voices, the sighs, the groans, the words of encouragement and cheer that constituted the life of the ship, he was deaf.

Over and over in his mind he rehearsed the recent months since his casual visit to Sin Chang, the Korean mountaineer, had brought him to Constance, that memorable day in Seoul. When had he fallen in love with her?

Working backwards from the awful revelation after her death he could see how his interest in her at every step in their acquaintance proved love at first sight.

That dimly lighted room off the little courtyard where he had first seen her. The slow grace with which she turned her shapely head at the sound of Sin Chang's deep, rumbling voice. The cigarette held as only she could hold a cigarette. The casual, indifferent glance bestowed upon him. To be sure, he was not looking his best at the time. It all came back, poignantly vivid.

Ah, but later he could console himself with visions when she had revealed at least an interest in him. There were times when the four had been together in Shanghai, when Esther was in one of her sharp moods, when Ko-Yiang was inexplicable—and Constance more than once had by a glance exchanged whole sentences with him. Her look had assured him that she trusted him. He had known then. Why, why in Heaven's name had he stood aloof?

"The sun is getting down; I think I may trust you in this light to try those eyes. You mustn't expect too much

of them after what they've been through." Thus the doctor, as he loosened Jerry's bandages.

Jerry was on his feet now. Despite his recent self-communion, his decision that it mattered nothing, his heart was pounding so that he heard every stroke. His hand found the rail, and he held on by that. "Which way am I facing?" he asked.

"Directly towards the land. As the ship swings, you face what was the heart of the city."

The bandage was off. With both hands now he braced himself for what was to come. He thought of the prisoner at the bar standing to hear sentence pronounced by the court. If he didn't open his eyes for another minute, by just so much would his sentence be deferred. Gradually he would let them open, sparing himself what disappointment he could, as a cautious skater trying thin ice. Light! He could see that it was no longer dark.

Upon that, caution went to the winds. What was caution to him? Had caution and Jerry Householder ever been bedfellows? With wide open eyes he gazed towards the land. Could he see, or was that waste before him the picture of his imagination?

Smoking, smouldering ruins to right, to left, down by the water's edge, far, far back—up to the hills that hold the city half encircled. All ruins, devastation, dilapidated walls here and there tottering on a fragment of foundation, for the most part flat, dreary waste, rubbish in heaps, all hot, giving off the sickening smell of burnt bodies.

But it was there; he was seeing it; his eyes had not been destroyed!

He started to proclaim his great good fortune, to shout for the joy of it. Then the blighting destruction where had been the beauty of Yokohama checked him. He could not speak, could only turn from the broken, tumbled mass of raised land which had been the Bluff, to the foreign business quarter and back again to the canal in search of one familiar landmark—but he turned in vain.

Far over on his right the newly erected building of the Electric Company stood unharmed, a simple concrete and steel commercial structure.

Modern banking offices, government buildings, big granite banks and shipping houses—all had gone with the pretty, flimsy lattice work of the native quarter.

Evening was approaching. Thousands still poked among the smoking wrecks of home or office for traces of loved ones or of treasures.

These things Jerry saw in that first sweep of his restored vision. Then instinctively his eyes sought the spot on the beach where he had held the body of his beloved, to lose it only with his own consciousness. Perhaps even now, if he could get ashore—unless the tide had carried it out. He shivered, turning away from the awful demolition, the crushed out life, the frightful end of Yokohama.

"I'm quite all right," he said to the man and woman standing next to him, then recognizing the man who was holding his recently removed bandage as the doctor, he

added: "Thanks to you, sir, and to a most sympathetic nurse."

He never heard their later comment after he had gone: "How cool that man was! Nothing to say when he thought he was blind. No surprise when he found he was not."

But they little knew what things were seething in his mind, things that made his sight for the moment seem unimportant.

Every inch of space on the ship was occupied. She was a great floating hospital. He heard talk of putting back to Kobe for food and water, a run of three hundred and fifty miles.

Tokyo was so badly hurt that stragglers were beginning to come in from there, having covered twenty miles on foot.

All about him the only talk aside from injuries was the extent of the damage.

It had ruined Kamakura, forty miles to the south. Some said the island of Oshima with its lofty volcano had disappeared.

In Yokohama was not a handful of rice, nor a drop of water. There was no transportation, the rails destroyed, trains toppled over into ditches.

Night was coming—night without a light, without police protection, without a roof or a bed for one of the thousands who, despite the great hegira, still remained.

Thus it was when Jerry Householder went ashore in the next launch—a tall, grimy figure dressed in tattered

rags of clothing, hatless, coatless, his strong face showing through its dirt a purpose that would brook no interference, listen to no argument.

Afterwards he might admit that the living had demanded more of him, of every man, than any tardy tribute to the dead. Now Jerry Householder saw but one image. Towards that he went.

CHAPTER XXXII

Every pier was so broken that an attempt to traverse one was to run the risk of death in one of the deep fissures that yawned at uncertain intervals everywhere.

The launch was run in as near the shore as floating débris would allow; the men leapt overboard waist deep and waded ashore.

Jerry had to push through a dozen dead bodies. All but one were Japanese, but it made him realize in an instant how hard the task that he had set himself.

For the third time he made his way to the Oriental. He was able even to locate the very spot from which he had extricated her.

Dead were lying all about, some half burned, none recognizable, for the fire had done its dreadful work.

Thus far the Japanese, paralyzed by the extent and thoroughness of the disaster, had no organization for relief. All their effort thus far had gone towards policing Tokyo where the city was but half destroyed. In Yokohama nothing was left to protect.

A few minutes Jerry stood in the midst of all that ruin, dazed, stunned by the magnitude, by the awfulness of it. Then, reason returning, he asked himself what he had expected to find there, and went leaping, clamber-

ing over piles of brick and stone, over half burned beams and blackened bodies to where he had held her for hours in the water, until his strength had given out.

But here was no better satisfaction—only the same nauseating smell, the ghastly sights of mangled, burned, mutilated creatures, dead already more than twenty-four hours. They lay in heaps all along the water front. Death? What was death in that city of the dead where the living were so few and the dead lay all about in thousands, in tens of thousands!

At first he scrutinized them as he stumbled along, sodden, charred, broken relics of what had been men and women.

He reached the canal. The bridge was gone. Where the road wound up to the Bluff was only an ugly scar left when the hill had crashed down burying Motomachi district, crushing its shops and houses under the ruthless avalanche.

The canal was choked, a little water trying to filter its way through.

Others were crossing. Jerry followed them, stepping on the bodies piled as chance had left them, piled high enough to choke the canal in which they had sought safety only to be parboiled.

High above him a wooden house hung poised on the ragged edge where the Bluff had been broken off. He climbed laboriously through the soft soil to reach it. The stone foundation had been literally torn out and thrown this way and that in the violent upheaval, leaving the

wracked, distorted house a parody on what it was, deformed until no two lines could be found running parallel.

Over the front door—if that remnant could be called a door—hung a horseshoe in the approved position to insure good luck.

Standing there where he could look down on miles of devastating tragedy Jerry laughed aloud, a laugh that shocked himself—the first reaction after so many hours of Hell.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "The horseshoe was saved!"

Possibly he might find some trace of his friends' house. Nearby he recognized Mr. Brady's by the tennis court which was absolutely uninjured, though the garage close by had sunk into the earth, only its roof visible, and the house utterly demolished.

Sick at heart he went on by the English Church now level with the ground, by the English graveyard where, in a grave scooped out as by an angry giant, he read upon the upturned gravestone this sardonic text: "He giveth his beloved sleep."

Nowhere a house or any building into which one might enter for a night's shelter. Complete, utter destruction in every direction.

No, how curious! Not complete, for here on the summit of the hill beside him where had been, but were no longer, the naval hospitals of England and America—a flagstaff stood, half burned through, a weak and sorry staff, but from its peak uninjured through it all, spared

by a hair's breadth from the common fate, floated the stars and stripes.

Her flag! Her beloved flag which she pardoned for the faults it covered, adored for the principles it was believed to represent.

With the military salute learned in the War he greeted it, younger son of his own proud flag.

Where was she now, that woman whom that flag represented?

Was it possible that nothing remained of her except the memory of a brave soul, a white soul that never could know defeat or failure, a dauntless soul that would be his inspiration as long as he lived!

How and when had it come to pass that she was here in Yokohama? Why had she come, and what of Mr. Ko? Her departure with him from Shanghai had never in the world been for a pleasure excursion. That wily schemer had in some way dragged her in to further his own selfish ends. What if her being here meant that she too had found him out?

The wild man in Jerry Householder was on edge to rush into some new danger, attack some imagined evil, do anything, so long as one needn't wait for detailed plans. The difficulty was that there was no longer anything for him to do—unless——

They must need help aboard the *Empress of Australia,* in caring for so many wounded, as they had cared for him.

Strange indeed how things happen. If this earthquake

had come at night the city would have been spared most of the horrors from fire.

Coming at noon, every house had its pot of coals over which the rice for dinner was cooking. Thus thousands of fires sprang up at once. Yet some believe that it is all so planned by an all wise Providence!

As Jerry pondered these difficult questions he was hurrying back to find the launch. There was nothing to be accomplished where he was.

Sudden resentment against Mr. Ko gripped him. If that snake hadn't lured her in some way she wouldn't have been here—would be alive somewhere. And if she had been alive and he, Jerry, had gone to her with his humble apology for having distrusted her once—would she have listened to him? He couldn't imagine those lovely eyes hard and cold. It simply wasn't in them to bestow a glance that wasn't kind.

He found the launch after a time of waiting which had nearly driven him to enlist among the volunteers who were removing a few of the dead from the nearest ruins. It had come back with a fresh load of those who, like him, must see for themselves that their loved ones were past all help. The disappointed but convinced were returning, a weary, despondent group, tearless but white with the horror of it.

Action! Action of any sort. Jerry's soul cried out for it. Beside him in the launch an elderly man locked and unlocked his two hands, gazed with unseeing eyes towards the receding shore, sighed audibly, then shivered

—not as one who feels the cold—as one who lives again in memory through anguish that is worse than pain.

Why ask him what it was? Why insult such grief with words, when words were trivial, quite inadequate to express what each was feeling, what each had suffered?

"Almighty God!" the man muttered, unconscious that he spoke aloud, "why both? Why not have spared me one? Why not? Why—not?"

Again the old man shivered, shivered, until his teeth chattered, but it was not cold.

If one could only do something to help, could lift or fight or shove his hand into the fire! But sitting still, looking on at grief while stifling one's own—inconceivably the hardest thing in the world for one of his temperament.

They had almost reached the ship when the old man, suddenly aware of him, turned to say: "What purpose, what purpose can be served by all this suffering?"

"Why look for a purpose?" Jerry suggested.

"There must be a purpose," the old man answered devoutly. Then with clenched fists added: "Yet will I not doubt Him." Faith!

How it took him back to his boyhood, to his father's comfortable belief in stained glass, credulity and sacraments!

Was the old man, fighting it out with his Faith, any happier than he who shut his teeth down hard on Reality, bent his back—and bore it?

When they got aboard there was news of a wireless just

in from the American admiral in the Philippines. He was already rushing help to Yokohama.

What a Nation! Constance's Nation!

The first to act—without a moment's delay they were in action. In spite of their crudities, in spite of their heterogeneous composition, they were a nation after his own heart. There's trouble. All right, act. Do something. If it's not the right thing, try something else. Constance's country—and his own idea of action!

Instantly the name of Jerry Householder was sent to the captain with the message: "Use me. I'll do any kind of work, but work I must."

There was work enough to be done. The captain, knowing his man, assigned him the duty of carrying food to those on the decks. The overworked stewards were not half enough for the task.

Most men and women want the showy jobs, heads of committees, armchair decisions, names in the papers, consulting jobs—on horseback just behind the band.

But somebody has to do the drudgery, the real work, on foot, not even up on a platform.

Captain Robinson knew his man, and he gave Jerry Householder real work, inconspicuous, hard work to do, knowing that it would be done, and done right.

It interested Jerry, as he ministered to the wants of so many, to note how much alike they were in appreciation of his services. He had expected it of his own countrymen, the courtesy which is not varnish nor yet veneer, but the outer surface of real character.

He knew the Japanese, but the Chinese he did not know. To his surprise all seemed genuinely to appreciate every attention. Suffering, sorrow, sympathy—what are differences of race and language in the great crisis!

During the evening he came to where a woman knelt on the deck bending over one who could speak only in whispers. One could tell from her figure, from the supple grace with which she bent, that the woman was young. He could not see her face, but as he passed he saw the man over whom she was leaning. It was the elderly man with whom he had come in the launch. A fellow worker furnished the information that he had collapsed shortly after reaching the ship; that the doctor had said it was heart strain, over-exertion, and he didn't think the old fellow had enough vitality left to see it through.

Jerry lingered, wondering how the old man's faith was holding out. Could he also say even now from his heart: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him?"

The faint voice reached his ears: "Repeat it for me, please—I—want Him to know—that I—was able—to—pray His prayer—even—after—this——"

Jerry could hardly hear the woman's voice for her head was bowed. She was repeating something very slowly, deliberately. Suddenly the old man's strength came back to give his words clear carrying force, distinctly audible now: "That's it. That's the part. 'Thy will be done! Thy—will—be—done.'"

The white head made an effort to rise. The woman gently put her hand behind it, lifting him until he half

sat. Once more the same clear tone: "'Thy will—be——'"

Jerry waited for the next word. Instead came a strange choking rattle. The mouth was open, the eyes glazed even now.

The woman tenderly laid him back, the old head where it had rested on the hard deck. A breath of wind stirred the white hair on his temples.

"I wonder," Jerry muttered as he moved away. "Faithful submission. Is it better or worse than Hell and blazes?"

CHAPTER XXXIII

Eight bells. Midnight.

The deck was almost dark, all but two lights extinguished, that those housed there might sleep.

Jerry Householder, hungry, thirsty, and very tired, leaned on the rail, peering into the night towards the city lying there so still, so calm in death, a vast graveyard of the unburied.

Not a light shone out where thousands had gleamed, not a sound or sign of life where hundreds of thousands lived and loved, and laughed only two days ago!

What was that cracking, like a board breaking? Surely no searcher among the ruins. No, the hyenas, the shiftless cowards of humanity, too lazy to work, too contemptible to help others, had come to prowl and help themselves. The Japanese, neither better nor worse than other nations, had their hyenas, and under cover of the darkness they had begun to fatten upon the dead. After all, what care the dead? What care the dead for tears, for flowers on their graves, for monuments? Who was it who said: "A lie will fade if you let it alone. On monuments lies live forever in stone." It was a pessimist, an iconoclast. The monument records a man's virtues,

doesn't pretend to be a summary, an exact accounting of debits and credits. And that too is our memory of our beloved dead—we recall the best because we loved them.

Shakespeare was only half right when he said the evil that men do lives after them.

Would Constance, then, know or care that he had risked his life to save her body from the flames?

Hadn't he been wrought to a pitch of madness at sight of that wife struggling to get free while the fire crept nearer, nearer, and the husband who would have died with her was torn away from her very arms!

Constance would never know. But he would know. The flowers on the grave were not for the dead who would never know, but for the comfort of the giver, the solace that is in expression, the relief of tears. "Thus endeth the second lesson." How often he had heard his father deliver this in his dry, unconvincing tone in the pulpit.

Well, this had been his second lesson. Esther had given him the first. Esther, who had acted lately as if she were ready now to take up the affair again, had intimated that she made a mistake when she threw him over to marry little Peter Landon.

Esther—still the wilful child who cries for the moon and yesterday—Esther who doesn't know about the water passing under the bridge, that men and some women grow up, are not today where they were this day five years since. Esther, the pretty egotist chasing pleasure, not even wise enough to see that they who chase Pleasure never overtake it. Esther—and the woolly dog on wheels.

Did she think he might still enjoy pulling that at the the end of a string?

What little things often change the whole current of our lives! A trembling of the earth, the slipping of its surface over an area of forty by a hundred miles—and four hundred thousand lives are ended, more than a million lives are diverted from their former channels.

Well, start where he would, it all came back to Constance. Trifles had always been the determining factor in his own life. The trifle of his getting so excited over an idiotic little plot had led him to Constance.

The trifle of his suspicion. Ah! That was not a trifle! Someone had come to share the darkness with him. He had chosen the darkest place on the deck. Always since early childhood he had found it helped to get away quite by himself to think things out.

Sometimes all the thoughts were not relevant. It didn't matter. It was so that he kept sane, got his perspective, took stock of what was left, got the courage to start again. He was glad of his contract with Westgate's house. Poor old Westgate!

But the change of scene, the necessity to make new friends, the very fact of keeping on—He had no idea of giving up, lying down, or moping over his dead past.

Someone, the outline seemed a woman—might be a man in a bath robe—had come to share the darkness, hadn't seen him there until she had stopped to lean over the rail and gaze towards the dark, silent waste that so short a time ago had been gay Yokohama.

She also had her memories, her sorrow and uncertainty, and even fears—for a sigh escaped her, and the hand on the rail gripped hard. All they could tell her was that she was picked up in the water, was scarcely conscious when brought aboard, but soon revived. In the water? How in the world did she ever get into the water?

"I remember that she and I stood there talking, just talk in which neither of us was interested—when it came! And then—was it nightmare or reality—that awful weight that wouldn't let me up?

"Oh, I remember—she was going to send me help and it didn't come—and I waited and cried—yes, I screamed—it must have come at last."

She shivered at the remembrance of it—the fire crackling and roaring, hot showers of sparks, stifling smoke—and that awful something that held her down!

She had seen by now that a man stood close beside her. At first she had thought she was alone. Perhaps he might know, this person who was sound enough to be on his feet—possibly a ship's officer.

"Do you know of a—Mrs. Lan-don—Esther Landon—who would have been brought aboard—when I was? I thought it just possible—you might know——"

The woman spoke deliberately. Jerry could have sworn it was Constance Farley's voice. Could have sworn it, only things like that don't happen. When they do, it shows a man is off his head. You get to dreaming of a thing, going over and over it in your mind—and it gets

you. It had got him. The woman beside him hadn't spoken. It was his distorted imagination.

She had taken her hands from the rail to face him. Once more that same voice. This time it merely had time to say: "I—" before he interrupted: "Oh! I'm so sorry!"

Then it was her turn to start. "Why—you're not— Do say something more. Your voice is so exactly like——"

"Well, what I mean, so is yours," he exploded. "That's the very point, d'you see?"

"Why, it is you!" she answered, and he could hear the joy in her voice.

But even now it was unbelievable. How could it be? Do the dead rise?

"Oh, I say!" he insisted, almost brusquely, because of his amazement and persistent doubt. "How did you get here? Are you Constance Farley, or just somebody with her voice?"

"I am Constance Farley, and I got here because Esther Landon sent help to dig me out just in time. We were together at the Oriental."

"Then it was you that I saw in the window!"

There was a moment of embarrassed silence before he went on: "I don't know now what drove me back to the ruins of the Oriental Palace. Something in the back of my mind—what I mean—some suspicion that it might be you——"

He couldn't hear the rapid beating of her heart or the voice that sang in her ears: "He cares!"

Presently he added: "But I thought you were dead. Even when I'd got you out—and held you there in the water."

"You!" she cried. "Was it you? I had been crying for help. The fire! Oh, it was so near, and no one—heard—and then—the very next I knew was when they lifted me into a boat—and Esther—didn't—send help! But—it was—you!"

Could she mean the caress in that sentence? Then because of the long tension he did an incredible thing, "What became of Mr. Ko?" he asked.

It was a dash of cold water in her face, but she was woman enough not to show it. "I cannot tell you," she said.

"But you left Shanghai with him."

"Yes."

The tide came lapping at the high side of the great ship. It made a light slapping, the only sound to break the silence. Had either of the two broken that silence,—but jealousy had taken a sudden hold upon Jerry, Jerry, who ten minutes before would have given his right arm for this opportunity. And pride had as suddenly sealed the lips of Constance at the moment when her heart exulted in the knowledge that he cared.

It would have been so simple, so womanly, for her to make allowance for his being a man, and to trust him with a detailed account of her journey back to the house of Sin Chang, explaining why she went, and what it cost her to discover the real Mr. Ko.

But he might think she was bidding for his friendship.

And Jerry—hadn't he been saying to himself that he was a cur to have distrusted her?

Hadn't he bowed his head to the dust with remorse? Yet here he was, speechless, jealous again of the rich Mr. Ko.

Didn't he realize it was insulting her to drop the subject so abruptly?

A cigarette carelessly flung away has destroyed miles of noble forest.

An opportunity tossed aside as carelessly as a cigarette has knocked a romance in the head.

Trifles are the turning points of lives. They make up the bulk of every life.

Insensibly the silence was prolonged until it became still harder to break it. It had become a duel; to go on with the conversation now was to acknowledge you were in the wrong.

Then a plaintive voice from the deck, well forward: "Water, please."

"Coming," she answered, but Jerry was half way down the deck. To do something—that had always been his way out of any difficulty. A drink of water for one of the injured. It was soon got.

How marvellous it all was! He had been talking with Constance. He had saved her life—without knowing it. She was alive! The thrill of that thought carried him back on flying feet, back to the spot where they had stood—silent. But Constance was gone.

Careful search of the ship failed to reveal her. She might come back. When eight bells chimed again and it was four in the morning, Jerry waited for her, but he waited in vain.

CHAPTER XXXIV

"WHAT became of Mr. Ko?" Constance repeated that question to herself as Jerry hurried off to get someone a drink of water. What indeed! How did she know what became of him? Thank Heaven, she didn't know. Sin Chang understood too well to mention it.

Mr. Ko might be walking or riding one of Sin Chang's bullocks to reach Seoul. No such possibility had entered her mind until Jerry had so bluntly brought up the question. It was more in his manner than in the words that the offence lay.

As though she were responsible for Mr. Ko—or worse, as though they were somehow to be associated, so that the same question would have been asked of him if he had been the one to come.

A woman met her wandering about in search of a nook where she could be alone, an understanding woman who had worked with her all the afternoon, had seen her brought aboard drenched and weak, had marvelled at her vitality and courage which had in a few hours transformed her from a patient to a nurse.

The woman insisted that she come down to her cabin for rest and sleep. Being a forceful woman she had her way.

At first Constance could only lie staring at the upper berth, her thoughts a wild tumult—when she had given up all idea of sleeping she slept. When she woke the ship was moving. That was her waking thought— Was she on her way home via Vancouver?

A strange woman, young, rather attractive, stood before the little mirror over the wash stand using the lip stick on lips already carmine yet not more brilliant than the red spots on her powdered cheeks.

Why should that sight remind her of Jerry?

Ah, it was what he said coming down on the train:

"Paint, powder and the lip stick keep more men virtuous than all the precepts in all the good books."

Jerry! How could she have been so impatient with him, even if he did—intimate certain things that were unwarrantable.

The girl who was making up like a Noah's Ark stopped long enough to explain that they were on the way back to Kobe to land the refugees.

By that time Constance was ready to cry for shame. How had she rewarded the man who had risked his life to save from the flames even her dead body!

She now recalled vividly his blistered face, scorched hair and bandaged hand. Hadn't he a perfect right to criticize her going away with Mr. Ko?

Wasn't it the natural thing to do? She would have done the same, herself!

Where could she find Jerry to explain her conduct? As quickly as she could she got back on deck. One glance

in that same little mirror and she was glad that women dress only for each other. Her borrowed odds and ends clothed her; that was all that anyone could say in their praise.

She found Jerry hard at work serving luncheon to refugees. There was nothing for her to do just then, so she sat and watched.

That man of tireless energy, putting his soul into everything he did, was the man who had saved her. She had known many. It was plain to see that she had attracted many—and not merely physically as she had attracted Mr. Ko.

Never had she felt towards anyone the same sort of affection which she felt for Jerry.

It was all kinds deliciously and delightfully rolled into one.

There he was rushing about; he didn't even suspect that she was watching him. He was dishevelled, in rags, not at all his neat, well-kept self. She was glad, glad to see him at his worst and know, as she knew now, that she loved him.

She was even not sorry about her own appearance because it was a real test.

Finally his work was finished. He came up and leaned on the rail looking off toward the land on the starboard side. He hadn't turned his head when she took a place beside him.

Deliberately she began:

"You asked what became of Mr. Ko."

"Oh, I say," he protested, "I didn't mean that."

"Why shouldn't you mean it? It's a perfectly proper question."

"In a way, perhaps, but what I mean——"

"Yes, I know. Well, you see, Jerry, it was like this."

"Do you know," he broke in before she could go on, "I think it's topping of you to call me Jerry—just as if I hadn't done anything at all to offend you."

"Offend me? I felt a stupid wretch about that. Why, you risked your life for me. If anyone has a right to ask me—things like that, you certainly have."

"Well, on my word now I didn't mean it offensively."

"Of course you didn't, but I want to tell you. There isn't anyone—but you—to whom I could tell it. Can't we go somewhere and sit down?"

It seemed at first that they couldn't find a place on all that big ship, but at last they succeeded in getting room enough to sit on the deck up against one of the lifeboats. There she told her story, beginning with Mr. Ko's plausible explanation of his peace project; the journey undertaken to enlist Sin Chang's influence; the conversation on the mountain side below Sin Chang's hut.

When she came to Ko-Yiang's passionate embrace, his whispered words; her fears that grew to certainty when she could not move him; his strength that was gradually wearing her down;—that moment of horror when things went black and she knew that he would have his way—

she made it all as matter of fact as she could, minimizing it. What she could not control was her voice as she told it.

Suddenly Jerry laid his hand on hers.

"It was far worse than you tell it," he said. "Your voice shakes so it tells more than you do. Don't say any more about it if it distresses you, but how—did it end?"

"Your own voice isn't very steady," she said.

"I don't feel steady," he answered, springing to his feet.

Action! If he could only do something about it!

"Sin Chang," she continued, ignoring his excitement, "I hadn't reckoned on his keenness. He was on the watch, came—just in time—I don't know what he did with him. He was holding him over his head, kicking, struggling, fighting. One great hand was on Ko's throat. And Sin Chang told me to go back to the house. He went farther down towards that ravine. And—well, that's all. When he joined Yisan and me in a few minutes, nothing was said. Next day he put me on a train for Fusan. I was on my way—home——"

"Home?" he asked. "Where is home?"

She smiled, that little wry smile that he had noticed the first time they met—in Seoul. He thought now, as he had thought then, that it was a brave smile, the smile of the woman who isn't afraid of life, who meets it bravely and cheerfully. Ah, but such a woman must have won that courage by experience. The pampered favorite of

fortune demands luxury, ease, security as her right. At heart she is a coward.

He knew that kind also—many of them—Esther was an example.

His voice was not quite steady when he answered his own question, but this time its unsteadiness was due to the little wry smile and all the dear, womanly quality that lay behind it.

"You have told me that, like me, you have no family, no home. But you are still young, you have lived long enough in the East to outgrow provincial narrowness. What I mean—you could make your home——"

He was floundering, embarrassed by his own words. He had thought it a particularly good opening for what he wanted to say, until—on the brink of it—he began to wonder how she would take it.

A woman reads the situation accurately where the man pictures it and doubts the meaning of what he sees. Constance knew what was in his mind, knew why he was embarrassed, was sure now of that for which she had scarcely dared to hope.

"I have learned that places are not what make home," she said.

"It's people—those whom you love—those who—" she stopped at that. When he had waited for her to go on, for he expected deliberate, careful choice of words, from her, and still she did not speak, he laid his hand on hers. She had drawn up her knees and sat there clasping them

in her locked hands, and his clasped them both in its strong, steady grip.

How much it meant—that grasp tightening over hers—then relaxing only to grip the harder.

She didn't turn her head to look at him.

How understanding of him not to speak, not to profane the sacredness of that moment with words.

Could words express the thrill that quivered through every nerve and fibre of her being? Could words convey the blinding brightness that had suddenly flashed from heaven to show where her path led? Could words tell him what Love meant to her who had thirsted for it, yet never recognized the need until she met him?

Could words picture a soul in Heaven? How lamentably they had failed in the book of the Revelation, leaving Heaven somewhere between a zoo and a jeweler's shop!

Her sense of humor had saved her many times before.

This time the picture of Heaven broke the spell of silence, yet only so far that she could look into his eyes and say—one word.

"Jerry!"

In his eyes she saw tears, for while she had been pondering her new found Heaven, he had gone back to the fluttering skirt, to the discovery that it was her body that lay there half buried in débris, to the frantic effort to save that body before the flames should devour it—and never once had he even suspected that she was alive!

Now, because of that reverent devotion—here she was

beside him. And in her voice and manner was that indescribable something that told him of her love.

No wonder the tears were in his eyes.

"Constance!" he murmured.

His hand on hers finished the sentence: "Till Death us do part."

"Yes," she whispered.

Evening overtook them still sitting there on the deck under the big lifeboat.

And with the darkness Jerry grew bolder. His arm encircled her, and she, nothing loath, snuggled close up to him.

"They will need us," she whispered again when nurses and helpers began their round of the decks.

"Yes, we must go," he assented, but his arm did not for an instant relax or offer to release her. She made no attempt to break away.

A few minutes couldn't matter much to the injured, but to her every minute was vital. How long ago was it that Jerry, her Jerry, had said that she had no home?

A few minutes, that was, and now—now and henceforth her home was where he was.

He put his lips close to her ear, so close that she wished he would keep that position for a thousand years—then he whispered:

"I came so near to losing you——"

"Do you remember, back in Shanghai, when I shocked you by talking nonsense about the emancipation of women?" she asked.

"Yes, it didn't sound like you—even then."

"That was nothing but bravado—I loved you, and I felt angry with myself for being so silly when you didn't want my love?"

"And, I, fool that I was, thought you were trying to please Mr. Ko."

He could feel her shudder at the recollection of that name.

"Was it—so dreadful?" he asked, enjoying the more his present sense of responsibility, his right henceforth to protect her.

She nodded, not trusting herself to speak of it.

Again, they were silent, thinking the same thoughts, trying to comprehend what life would mean now that its cup was full.

Had any inquisitive person turned a flashlight on the pair it would have revealed a man, unkempt, unshaven, in ragged clothes; a woman wearing a borrowed bath wrap——

But on the faces of both, even a poor flashlight would have shown the joy unspeakable, the one glimpse of Heaven, the realization of eternal life which is revealed to those who love with perfect understanding.

THE END

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